

**The Principal's Role in Increasing Community Attraction
at SMPN 5 Kerinci**

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Abstract: *This study aims to understand the principal's role in increasing the community's attraction to SMPN 5 Kerinci, especially amidst the challenges of declining numbers of students. The approach used was descriptive qualitative with observation, interview and documentation techniques. Informants in this study included the principal, teachers, students and the surrounding community. The results showed that the principal performed five important roles that emerged from the real dynamics in the field, namely as a motivator, facilitator, administrator, communicator, and innovator. The five roles were formulated based on the researcher's understanding of the informants' experiences and views. Each role contributes to building the quality of education services and strengthening the positive image of the school in the eyes of the community. Adaptive leadership that is open to collaboration has been proven to foster public trust and improve school competitiveness. These findings underline the importance of strengthening the capacity of school principals in facing the changes and challenges of education in the current era.*

Keywords: *Principal Leadership, Community Attraction, Education Strategy.*

Introduction

In the last five years, SMP Negeri 5 Kerinci has experienced significant new student enrolment dynamics. Based on internal school data attached during an interview with the principal, in 2020 there were 110 new students. However, in 2021 there was a decrease to 89 students, or a decrease of around 19.1%. A similar decline occurred again in 2022, with the number of new students only reaching 72 people, which means a decrease of 19.1% compared to the previous year.

After two consecutive years of decline, a positive trend began to be seen in 2023. The number of new learners increased to 78, an increase of about 8.3% from 2022. Expectations of recovery were further strengthened in 2024, when the number of new admissions increased to 90, reflecting a growth of 15.4% from the previous year. Parents of students stated that there are improvement efforts that are starting to bear fruit, as well as the potential for restoring

public confidence in SMP Negeri 5 Kerinci as an educational choice for their children.¹

Despite the increase in the number of new students, this fluctuating trend is a reminder that community trust is something that needs to be built on an ongoing basis through adaptive leadership, relevant programs, and open communication between the school and the surrounding neighborhood. In the midst of intense competition between educational institutions in Kerinci Regency, schools are required not only to provide proper educational services, but also to be able to build a positive image in the eyes of the community. In this situation, the role of the principal is crucial because he/she is not just an administrative manager, but a leader who has vision, empathy, and strategy. Principals also play a dual role, as proactive entrepreneurs in meeting student enrollment targets and as dedicated educational leaders in improving academic achievement. With strong leadership, principals can improve the quality of education and regain the community's trust in the school.²

As confirmed in international research by Timothy E. Smith and his colleagues, leadership oriented towards collaboration between schools, families and communities has a strategic role in building public trust in educational institutions.³ Open, communicative and participatory leadership allows for a harmonious atmosphere of cooperation between the school and parents. This well-established relationship not only strengthens community support but also fosters a sense of belonging to the school. In the context of SMPN 5 Kerinci, the application of these collaborative values is an important step in strengthening the positive image of the school as well as increasing the community's attraction to educational institutions.

Therefore, in order to meet these challenges, it is important to understand the extent to which the principal's leadership has a real influence on various aspects of school life. Principal leadership has a significant impact on various aspects, including improving student achievement, improving teacher welfare, and strengthening the welfare of the school organization. In addition, effective principals can also reduce student absenteeism, which is an important indicator of educational success. In the context of the pandemic, the role of school principals has become even more crucial in managing rapid

¹ Data Internal SMP Negeri 5 Kerinci, Rekapitulasi Jumlah Peserta Didik Tahun 2020–2024 (Kerinci: Arsip Sekolah SMP Negeri 5 Kerinci, 2024).

² Widodo Ong, "Meningkatkan Jumlah Siswa Dan Kualitas Akademik Siswa Melalui Peran Kepemimpinan Kepala Sekolah [Increasing Number and Academic Quality of Students Through the Leadership Role of Principal]," *Jurnal Ketopong Pendidikan*, 2, no. 1 (2022): 54, <https://doi.org/10.19166/jkp.v2i1.5521>.

³ Tyler E. Smith et al., "Exploring the Link between Principal Leadership and Family Engagement across Elementary and Middle School," *Journal of School Psychology* 84, no. August 2020 (2021): 49–62, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsp.2020.12.006>.

change and ensuring the continuity of quality education processes.⁴ Therefore, principals can play an important role in improving the quality of education and increasing the resilience of schools in the face of challenges.

To increase the attractiveness of the school, the principal needs to develop an effective marketing strategy, which includes analyzing the market, understanding the competition, and establishing a solid marketing team. These strategies may include promotion through print media, building relationships with other institutions, and utilizing word of mouth.⁵ In addition, principals also play an important role in creating a conducive learning environment and motivating teaching staff and students to actively participate in the process of improving the quality of education.⁶ In the context of national education, principals face increasingly complex challenges, particularly in relation to declining student numbers and intense competition among schools, particularly in urban and suburban areas. The principal not only acts as an educational leader, but also as an entrepreneur responsible for achieving student enrollment targets, as stipulated in the Decree of the Minister of National Education No. 13/2007.⁷

This research shows that good principal leadership can improve student academic outcomes, teacher well-being and the overall health of the school organization.⁸ Thus, principals can play an important role in improving the quality of education and increasing community trust in schools. The national education system is a unit consisting of various educational components that are interconnected and coordinated to achieve national education goals.

In the world of education, school principals not only manage internal affairs, but also play a role in building public trust. This is done through various concrete efforts, such as open and quality education services, parental involvement, and responsive communication. With that, school becomes more than just a place of learning, it exists as a part of social life that is trusted

⁴ Philip Saagyum Dare and Atif Saleem, "Principal Leadership Role in Response to the Pandemic Impact on School Process," *Frontiers in Psychology* 13, no. July (2022): 11–14, <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.943442>.

⁵ Meri Aulia, Fuad Rahman, and Sukarno Sukarno, "Marketing Management of The Principal in An Effort to Increase the Number of New Students in Madrasah Aliyah Nurul Iman Singkut," *International Journal of Education and Digital Learning (IJEDL)* 1, no. 4 (2023): 133–38, <https://doi.org/10.47353/ijedl.v1i4.22>.

⁶ Philip Saagyum Dare and Atif Saleem, "Principal Leadership Role in Response to the Pandemic Impact on School Process," *Frontiers in Psychology* 13, no. July (2022): 11–14, <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.943442>.

⁷ Widodo Ong, "Meningkatkan Jumlah Siswa Dan Kualitas Akademik Siswa Melalui Peran Kepemimpinan Kepala Sekolah [Increasing Number and Academic Quality of Students Through the Leadership Role of Principal]," *Jurnal Ketopong Pendidikan* 2, no. 1 (2022): 54, <https://doi.org/10.19166/jkp.v2i1.5521>.

⁸ Jawatir Pardosi and Tria Ina Utari, "Effective Principal Leadership Behaviors to Improve the Teacher Performance and the Student Achievement," *F1000Research* 10 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.12688/f1000research.51549.2>.

by the community. In formal education, the interaction between learners and the learning process is a very important integral part of the system. Therefore, learners are considered as one of the key elements in the education system.⁹

In the context of education, the role of an ideal principal is crucial to achieving school effectiveness and improving teacher and student performance. Some of the key indicators identified as characteristics of effective principals include wisdom, honesty, responsibility, exemplary, discipline, and the ability to communicate well.¹⁰ At SMPN 5 Kerinci, the principal tries to build community trust through a communicative and participatory approach. One of the steps taken is to establish open communication with parents through regular meetings and discussion forums involving the school committee and community leaders. Through this forum, various inputs and aspirations from the community are accommodated as considerations in the formulation of school policies. In addition, the principal encourages transparency in the implementation of school programs, including in the delivery of information on the use of the budget and the achievement of student learning outcomes. This openness provides a sense of trust to the community that the school is managed accountably and in favor of the progress of students.

These efforts have gradually succeeded in restoring public trust in the school, which had previously experienced a decline in image due to various internal constraints. This shows that principals can play an important role in improving the quality of education and achieving national education goals. Then, the role of the principal is also very much needed in facing the challenges of the ever-changing world of education. A principal is not only in charge of managing administration or ensuring learning activities run smoothly, but also being a leader who inspires, guides and fosters the spirit of all school members. Good leadership is able to create a warm, respectful learning atmosphere, and encourage each teacher and student to develop according to their potential.¹¹ To achieve sustainable educational success, strengthening the capacity of school leadership is crucial. Schools need to adapt quickly to various changes, such as technological developments, social dynamics and post-pandemic challenges.

⁹ Nahdhiatul Munawaroh, Eri Purwanti, and Apri Wahyudi, "Strategi Kepala Sekolah Dalam Meningkatkan Jumlah Peserta Didik Di SMK YAPEMI Pagelaran Pendahuluan Peserta Didik Merupakan Seseorang Yang Mengembangkan Potensinya Melalui Proses Pendidikan , Baik Yang Dilaksanakan Di Lembaga Formal Maupun Informal . Seko" 10, no. 1 (2024): 86-101.

¹⁰ Aan Juhana Senjaya, "Indicators of Good Principal Leadership Based on Principal, Teachers, and Administration Staff Perspectives in The Era of Industrial Revolution 4.0," *Educational Administration Research and Review* 3, no. 2 (2020), <https://doi.org/10.17509/earr.v3i2.22372>.

¹¹ Philip Saagyum Dare and Atif Saleem, "Principal Leadership Role in Response to the Pandemic Impact on School Process," *Frontiers in Psychology* 13, no. July (2022): 11-14, <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.943442>.

Principals who have a clear vision, are open-minded and dare to innovate can bring schools to be more advanced and relevant to the needs of society. With strong and empathetic leadership, schools are not only a place to gain knowledge, but also a second home that shapes the character, values and future of the nation's next generation. The principal also has a big role in creating an environment conducive to effective teaching and learning. A conducive environment not only helps students in understanding lessons, but also supports their social and emotional development holistically. Caring principals are usually directly involved in observing the learning process in the classroom and assisting teachers in carrying out academic activities with dedication. Their presence not only ensures more effective learning, but also provides encouragement and motivation for teachers to continue to develop and provide the best for students.¹²

In addition, principals also play an important role in creating a conducive learning environment by guiding, managing and supporting teachers and students. By strengthening the role of communicative supervision, principals can improve discipline and create a harmonious and productive learning atmosphere.¹³ Through appropriate leadership, principals are able to encourage the creation of a better quality learning environment that is in line with the ideals of national education. Effective interpersonal communication between principals and teachers is one of the main factors in building a quality and supportive school environment. Through open, empathic and solution-oriented communication, principals can foster mutual trust and togetherness among all school members. Inspirational direction and continuous motivation make teachers feel valued and eager to contribute more optimally in improving learning quality.

With the creation of harmonious and trusting working relationships, the school is able to become a better, more conducive and enjoyable place to learn for students.¹⁴ Furthermore, effective principal leadership is not only about managing school administration, but also about inspiring and motivating the entire school community. With clear and meaningful communication of the school's vision and goals, the principal can build a spirit of togetherness and encourage all school members to move forward together

¹² Nazish Farid, Dr. Khisro Kaleem, and Dr. Nasrullah Khan, "Exploring the Role of Principals in Developing Conducive Schools Environment for Learning," *Research Journal of Social Sciences and Economics Review (RJSSER)* 1, no. 2 (2020): 79-84, [https://doi.org/10.36902/rjsser-vol1-iss2-2020\(79-84\)](https://doi.org/10.36902/rjsser-vol1-iss2-2020(79-84)).

¹³ Agus Daniar and Zahra Nurhaniza, "Peran Komunikasi Interpersonal Kepala Sekolah Mendorong Guru Sekolah Alam Bandung Dalam Bekerja Dan Berprestasi," *Komunikologi: Jurnal Pengembangan Ilmu Komunikasi Dan Sosial*, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.30829/komunikologi.v5i1.9313>.

¹⁴ I Snijders et al., "Building Bridges in Higher Education: Student-Faculty Relationship Quality, Student Engagement, and Student Loyalty," *International Journal of Educational Research* 100 (2020): 101538, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijer.2020.101538>.

to achieve mutual success.¹⁵ Therefore, effective principal leadership can encourage the creation of a higher quality learning environment that is oriented towards the overall progress of the school.

This study aims to analyze the strategic role of school principals in facing the challenges of declining student numbers and increasing competition among schools. The study focuses on how the principal integrates his five main roles as motivator, facilitator, administrator, communicator and innovator synergistically to increase the attractiveness of the school and rebuild public trust in educational institutions.¹⁶ Through this approach, the research seeks to reveal the leadership dynamics of school principals in creating an adaptive, inclusive, and needs-oriented learning environment for students and the surrounding community. In addition, the study also evaluated the principals' ability to adjust to significant changes, such as those that occurred during the pandemic, and examined the extent to which their leadership styles impacted on improving student academic achievement and teacher well-being.

This research also emphasizes the importance of strengthening the leadership capacity of school principals, this research is expected to contribute to the development of a more responsive and sustainable education policy, as well as a foundation for improving the quality of national education in the future. In this context, school principals are required not only to be administrative managers, but also leaders who are able to foster community trust through adaptive, communicative, and change-oriented leadership.¹⁷ In addition to these practical and theoretical contributions, this research has novelty value in how to understand and describe the role of the principal who does not only focus on administrative aspects, but also as a leader who is able to rebuild public trust in schools amid the challenges of declining student enrollment.

However, the uniqueness of this study lies in integrating the five main roles of the principal as motivator, facilitator, administrator, communicator and innovator into a complementary adaptive leadership framework. Research at SMPN 5 Kerinci reveals the practice of humanist and communicative school leadership in a non-urban area with distinctive socio-

¹⁵ Agus Daniar and Zahra Nurhaniza, "Peran Komunikasi Interpersonal Kepala Sekolah Mendorong Guru Sekolah Alam Bandung Dalam Bekerja Dan Berprestasi," *Komunikologi: Jurnal Pengembangan Ilmu Komunikasi Dan Sosial*, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.30829/komunikologi.v5i1.9313>.

¹⁶ Ahmad Salim et al., "The Role of School Principals in Improving the Success of Elementary School Management: A Qualitative Case Study in Yogyakarta," *EDUKASIA: Jurnal Pendidikan Dan Pembelajaran*, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.62775/edukasia.v5i2.1378>.

¹⁷ Kathrin Dederich and Marcus Pietsch, "School Leader Trust and Collective Teacher Innovativeness: On Individual and Organisational Ambidexterity's Mediating Role," *Educational Review* 77, no. 2 (2025): 351-80, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131911.2023.2195593>.

cultural characteristics. The principal was able to adapt policies to the needs of the community and build harmonious relationships between the school, parents and the community. Through a qualitative approach based on field experience, this study shows that the principals' collaborative and innovative strategies succeeded in restoring their image and increasing community trust. The findings contribute to the development of an adaptive and sustainable leadership model in the face of modern education dynamics.

Research Methods

This research uses a descriptive qualitative approach to deeply understand the principal's role in overcoming declining student numbers and attracting public interest in SMPN 5 Kerinci. This approach was chosen because it is able to describe the principal's strategy in the real context of school and social life.¹⁸ Data were collected through observation, structured interviews and documentation. Observations were made of various principal activities, such as visits to students' homes, involvement in community activities, and utilization of social media as a means of school promotion.

Interviews were conducted involving the principal, teachers, students and the community to explore their views and experiences of the strategies implemented. Documentation was used to strengthen the data through archives of student numbers and school programs. All data were analyzed through the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. To ensure data validity, researchers applied triangulation of techniques and sources, so that the results of the study could provide an objective, in-depth picture, and in accordance with the reality in the field.¹⁹

Results and Discussion

The Principal's Role as a Motivator

The principal's role is crucial in creating a positive, inspiring and learner-oriented learning environment. At SMPN 5 Kerinci, this responsibility is reflected through the implementation of policies that favor students' needs. The principal not only performs administrative functions, but is also a source of inspiration for teachers and students. He or she plays an active role in building a productive and collaborative school culture. Through visionary leadership, the principal instills the values of discipline, responsibility and

¹⁸ Sugiyono, *Metode Penelitian Kualitatif, Kuantitatif, dan R&D* (Bandung: Alfabeta, 2021), <https://opac.perpusnas.go.id/DetailOpac.aspx?id=1220761>

¹⁹ Ari Wibowo Sembiring and Budi Budi, "Principal's Leadership Role in Developing Education Quality Culture," *Urwatul Wutsqo: Jurnal Studi Kependidikan Dan Keislaman* 14, no. 2 (2025): 581–91, <https://doi.org/10.54437/urwatulwutsqo.v14i2.2194>.

enthusiasm for learning.²⁰ These efforts make the school environment more conducive to the academic and character growth of students.

As a motivator, the principal shows high commitment in improving students' learning spirit and morality.²¹ He organizes various religious activities that strengthen spiritual and ethical values. In addition, giving awards to outstanding students is a form of appreciation for their efforts. The principal also provides support for teachers through training and continuous professional development.²² To maintain discipline, a point system is implemented that fosters responsibility and motivation to learn. Despite the limited facilities, the principal still strives to create a comfortable and pleasant learning atmosphere.

More than just an administrative leader, the principal at SMPN 5 Kerinci acts as a change agent who builds collaboration with various parties. She builds close relationships with teachers, students, parents and the community to create a harmonious learning environment. Through training, experience-sharing forums and project-based curriculum, she encourages relevant and contextualized learning. Her concern for student development is also realized through diverse extracurricular activities. By instilling human values such as mutual respect, cooperation and openness, a strong sense of belonging is created in the school environment. As a result, students feel valued, teachers are more energized and parents have more confidence in the quality of the school.

The Principal's Role as Facilitator

As a leader in the school, the principal has an important role in creating a warm, inclusive and progress-oriented learning atmosphere. He or she does not simply supervise teachers, but is present as a mentor who guides them to continue to develop professionally. Through various trainings, workshops and experience-sharing forums, principals help teachers find new ways to enliven the learning process in the classroom. Teachers feel more confident and open to innovative ideas that spur teaching creativity. This collaborative atmosphere fosters a new spirit among school members. As a result, students'

²⁰ F Naz and Surryia Rashid, "Effective Instructional Leadership Can Enhance Teachers' Motivation and Improve Students' Learning Outcomes" 4 (2021): 477-85, [https://doi.org/10.36902/sjesr-vol4-iss1-2021\(477-485\)](https://doi.org/10.36902/sjesr-vol4-iss1-2021(477-485)).

²¹ Angellica Angellica and Nurhayati Siagian, "Perbedaan Tingkat Pengetahuan Tentang Pemberantasan Sarang Nyamuk Demam Berdarah Dengue Berdasarkan Metode Ceramah Dan Video Animasi Pada Siswa Sekolah Dasar," *Nutrix Journal* 9, no. 1 (2025): 160, <https://doi.org/10.37771/nj.v9i1.1295>.

²² Advent Ponconoko Wijoyo et al., "Strategi Dalam Mengatasi Tantangan Implementasi Kredensial Dan Pengembangan Keprofesian Berkelanjutan (PKB) Infection Prevention and Control Nurse (IPCN) Di Rumah Sakit Swasta Kota Bandung," *Nutrix Journal*, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.37771/nj.v9i1.1286>.

learning experiences become more interesting, meaningful and have a positive impact on their learning outcomes.²³

This participatory and empathetic leadership has helped build community trust in SMPN 5 Kerinci. Parents see a real change in the way the school treats students as individuals who need to be supported, not just taught. School is now a fun place for children to learn, interact and develop their potential. The principal also maintains an open relationship with parents through active and transparent communication. The school's success in creating this positive climate comes from the cooperation of all parties, not just the leadership. The synergy between the principal, teachers, students and the community is a strong foundation for the school's good reputation in the eyes of the public.

The principal's commitment to building a comfortable learning environment is evident in various policies and concrete actions. He ensures that learning spaces are appropriate and supportive, from classroom renovations to the provision of adequate laboratory facilities, libraries and internet access. Not only that, he also pays great attention to the development of students' talents and interests through varied and educational extracurricular activities. This support helps students foster a sense of confidence, responsibility and pride in their school. To maintain program sustainability, the principal actively collaborates with the government, community and alumni. Through this strong collaboration, SMPN 5 Kerinci is developing as a school that not only teaches, but also fosters humanity, creativity and togetherness at every step.

The Principal's Role as an Administrator

As a leader and administrator, the principal holds the primary responsibility for ensuring that all school activities are effective, efficient and quality-oriented. His duties are not only concerned with managing documents and regulations, but also include creating a positive working environment for teachers, staff and students. With a flexible and planned leadership style, principals try to balance administrative demands and educational development needs. Global challenges such as declining student enrollment rates require principals to be more creative and adaptive in designing strategies.²⁴ Experience in various countries shows that the role of school principals has now expanded beyond that of managers. They are

²³ Guangqiang Wang, "The Effect of Teacher-Student Relationships on Innovative Teaching From the Teachers' Perspective: A Moderated Mediation Model of Teacher Self-Efficacy and Teacher Collaboration," *Psychology in the Schools*, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.1002/pits.23523>.

²⁴ Chun Sing Maxwell Ho, "Unpacking the Principal Strategies in Leveraging Weighted Student Funding," *Sustainability*, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.3390/su151612592>.

required to be educational innovators who are able to read changes, adapt quickly, and foster public trust in the institutions they lead.

A comparison of several countries shows that educational leadership can take many forms according to the context and challenges faced. In Chile, for example, principals play an entrepreneurial role in education with a focus on marketing strategies and school attractiveness.²⁵ Meanwhile, in the United States, the open enrollment system encourages healthy competition between schools to attract prospective students, without ignoring the principles of equality and access to education. These conditions inspire the education system in Indonesia to strengthen the character of school principals as agents of change.²⁶ Principals are expected not only to lead, but also to mobilize all school components towards a sustainable culture of quality. With a clear vision and open communication, they become figures capable of maintaining a balance between orderly administration and progressive innovation.

A similar situation also occurred at SMPN 5 Kerinci, where the decline in student numbers became a challenge that required real and wise action. Realizing this, the principal took the initiative to build a more transparent, friendly and efficient administration system by utilizing digital technology. This step not only facilitates academic and non-academic services, but also strengthens communication between the school and the community. Various excellent programs were developed, such as improving the quality of learning, enriching extracurricular activities, and implementing an Open House program that introduces the school to prospective students and parents. In addition, the provision of scholarships for underprivileged students and awards for outstanding students is a tangible manifestation of commitment to inclusive and equitable education. Through these sustainable efforts, the principal emerges not only as a skilled administrator, but also as an innovator who advances the school and restores community trust.

The Principal's Role as a Communicator

Quality education is not only determined by learning methods, but also by the school's ability to build harmonious communication among all its citizens. A comfortable learning atmosphere that supports the development of learners is created through positive interactions between the principal, teachers, students and the community.²⁷ In this case, the principal has an important role as a driver of effective communication within the school. He

²⁵ Adrián Zancajo, "Schools in the Marketplace: Analysis of School Supply Responses in the Chilean Education Market," *Educational Policy* 34, no. 1 (2020): 43–64, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0895904819881781>.

²⁶ Studi, P., Teknologi, M., Universitas, P., & Harapan, P. (2022). *Jurnal Ketopong Pendidikan*. 2, 54–64. <https://doi.org/10.19166/jkp.v2i1.5521>

²⁷ M Mahbubi et al., "Enhancing Educational Quality Through Effective Communication in Private Universities," *Journal of Education and Learning Sciences* 5, no. 1 (2025): 23–38, <https://doi.org/10.56404/jels.v5i1.124>.

not only conveys policies, but also sets an example in discipline, responsibility and professionalism. His consistent presence and openness to dialogue create a culture of respectful communication.²⁸ Through such communication patterns, schools grow into learning spaces that are not only academically productive, but also emotionally warm.

The principal also plays an important role in building external communication with the community and other related parties. Through the school committee forum, face-to-face activities, and the use of social media, the principal tries to bridge the relationship between the school and the community. This step aims to strengthen public trust while expanding community participation in education development. Open and transparent public communication can strengthen the school's image in the eyes of the community.²⁹ A good relationship between the principal and the community helps to create a productive collaboration in supporting the education program. Thus, open, consistent and transparent communication from the principal encourages community participation in the planning and implementation of school programs, thereby increasing trust and support for the school.³⁰

At SMPN 5 Kerinci, effective communication practices have been key to successfully building a sense of community between the school and the local community. Local residents' participation in community service activities, cultural events, and support for extracurricular programs demonstrates their genuine involvement in school life. The principal actively maintains relationships with local government and education agencies to ensure that school programs are aligned with community policies and needs. This collaboration strengthens the school's position as a center of learning and a social space that fosters character and values of togetherness. When communication is open and synergistic, education becomes a shared responsibility, not just the sole responsibility of schools. The success of education is the result of collective work by all parties who care about the future of the nation's young generation.

²⁸ Sofia Sofia, Khasnah Syaidah, and Akhmad Shunhaji, "Principal's Effective Communication and Teacher Performance: A Classroom Perspective," *Kelola: Jurnal Manajemen Pendidikan* 10, no. 2 (2023): 101-114, <https://doi.org/10.24246/j.jk.2023.v10.i2.p101-114>.

²⁹ Frontiers in Education. (2022). The Principal's Role in Improving the Quality: A Conceptual Framework for Developing School Culture. *Frontiers in Education*. <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/educ.2022.854463/full>

³⁰ Manakshi Panindranauth, "Principals' Roles in Developing a Positive School Culture Through Communication and Building Relationships," *Journal of Educational Leadership in Action* 9, no. 1 (2023), <https://doi.org/10.62608/2164-1102.1144>.

The Role of the Principal as an Innovator

School principals play an important role in advancing education through visionary and innovative leadership. They not only function as managers of school resources, but also as key drivers in implementing changes in line with the demands of the times. Innovations include improving teacher competence, utilizing technology in learning, and adjusting the curriculum to be relevant to the needs of students.³¹ Support from school principals through training, mentoring, and providing space for creativity has a positive impact on improving learning effectiveness.³² The role of the principal as an innovator is not limited to creating new policies, but also to building a school culture that is open to change and values creativity. Effective leadership encompasses six key roles, namely educator, manager, supervisor, leader, innovator, and motivator.³³

This spirit of innovation is evident at SMPN 5 Kerinci through various strategies designed to improve the quality and appeal of the school. The principal strives to create an education system that not only emphasizes academic achievement but also develops the character and potential of students as a whole. Flagship programs are creatively designed according to students' talents and interests so that each individual has room to grow. Digital technology is utilized through website management, social media, and online activities such as webinars to expand communication with the community. Collaboration with local media has helped strengthen the school's positive image in the public eye. Through this strategy, SMPN 5 Kerinci has successfully established itself as an educational institution that is adaptive and responsive to the changing times.

The innovative leadership of the principal at SMPN 5 Kerinci has been a key factor in building a progressive and inclusive learning environment. The principal plays an active role in encouraging teachers to innovate through creative, interactive, and student-centered learning. He also fosters human values such as honesty, cooperation, and empathy in every school activity. This approach creates a harmonious working atmosphere and fosters mutual trust among school members. The innovations implemented have increased public confidence in the quality of education services. Thus, SMPN 5 Kerinci has grown into an institution with character, competitiveness, and the ability to respond to educational challenges in the modern era.

³¹ Subkhi Mahmasani. (2020). View Metadata, Citation and Similar Papers at core.ac.uk. 274 282.

³² Arafat, S. (2022). The role of the Principal as Innovation on Teacher Performance. *Edumaspul: Jurnal Pendidikan*, 6(2), 2095–2097. <https://doi.org/10.33487/edumaspul.v6i2.4530>

³³ Citraningsih, E., & Hidayat, R. (2018). Peran kepala sekolah dalam meningkatkan kinerja guru. *Jurnal Manajemen Pendidikan*, 12(2), 115–127. <https://doi.org/10.21009/jmp.122.05>

Conclusion

This study reveals that principals play a key role in addressing declining enrollment and increasing community interest in schools. This is achieved through the principal's roles as motivator, facilitator, administrator, communicator, and innovator, which are mutually supportive. At SMPN 5 Kerinci, the principal has succeeded in creating a conducive and enjoyable learning environment that is responsive to the changing times. The leadership strategies implemented have not only contributed to improving the quality of learning, but have also strengthened the relationship between the school and the community, which in turn has increased public trust in the educational institution. In addition, the application of technology, improved communication between various parties, and innovation in educational management are important factors in building an excellent and competitive school image. With a collaborative, adaptive leadership approach focused on mutual progress, the principal has succeeded in motivating all elements of the school to achieve better educational goals. Therefore, strengthening the leadership skills of school principals through continuous training and guidance is crucial in order to cope with changes in education in the modern era and to realize quality, inclusive, and sustainable education.

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