

ANALYSIS OF THE INFLUENCE OF STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP ON MENTAL HEALTH PROGRAMS IN MUNA DISTRICT SCHOOLS

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ABSTRACT

Mental health among students is a crucial aspect of education, influencing both academic performance and individual well-being. However, the implementation of mental health programs in Muna Regency faces significant challenges, including limited resources and insufficient teacher training. This study addresses a knowledge gap in the literature by exploring the relationship between strategic leadership and the effectiveness of mental health programs in schools. A qualitative descriptive approach was used, involving in-depth interviews with stakeholders, such as school principals and the Muna Regency Department of Education, to identify key elements of strategic leadership. The findings reveal that strategic leadership significantly contributes to overcoming implementation challenges through innovative strategies, such as community-based approaches and teacher recognition. The implications of this study underscore the importance of school principals as strategic leaders in fostering synergy among stakeholders, which positively impacts student mental well-being and ensures the sustainability of mental health programs in schools.

Keywords: Education; Mental Health; Muna Regency; School; Strategic Leadership

INTRODUCTION

Students' mental health is an essential component in the education system that affects academic achievement and personal development. According to Ayuningtyas (2019), good mental health in students contributes positively to academic achievement and social interaction. However, in Indonesia, attention to mental health in the school environment is still less than optimal. Santika (2021) stated that the government's strategic policies in the field of education need to be improved to face students' mental health challenges. In addition, Lubis (2022) highlighted that improving teacher human resources through driving programs can play a role in supporting students' mental health. This condition shows the need for a more comprehensive approach in dealing with mental health issues in schools.

The strategic leadership of the principal plays a crucial role in the implementation of mental health programs in schools. According to Santosa (2020), the principal's leadership strategy in facing the digital era 4.0 can affect the quality of education, including aspects of

student mental health. In addition, Andriani (2015) emphasized that the principal's leadership strategy plays a role in realizing an effective school that supports student welfare. However, research by Salim (2023) shows that the role of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) in maintaining the mental health of students at SMP Negeri 2 Wonogiri still needs to be improved. This indicates that strategic leadership that is adaptive and responsive to students' mental health needs is urgently needed.

Not all schools in Indonesia have successfully implemented mental health programs optimally. This can be seen from various studies that show that there are still many mental health programs that are only formalities without a significant impact on students (Nurochim, 2020). Lack of understanding of the importance of mental health, both among teachers and parents, is often a major obstacle (Santika, 2021). In addition, the lack of training for educators in handling students' mental health further exacerbates this situation (Solihah, 2024). This condition shows that there is a gap between the policies that have been designed and the implementation in the field.

In particular, in Muna Regency, the implementation of mental health programs in schools still faces significant challenges. The strategic leadership of school principals has not been fully able to overcome the limitations of human resources and program support facilities (Rahabav, 2024). In addition, support from local governments in the form of training or the provision of professional counselors is also still very limited (Saude et al., 2020). Previous research has shown that a fragmented approach in the absence of strategic direction from school leaders leads to low effectiveness of mental health programs (Purnama et al., 2021). This condition creates a gap between the potential of ideal mental health programs and the reality on the ground.

The lack of an in-depth study of the relationship between strategic leadership and the effectiveness of mental health programs in Muna Regency is a major problem. Most previous studies focused more on program implementation without looking at leadership roles as a key factor (Fitriantini et al., 2019). No research has comprehensively identified the specific elements in strategic leadership that most influence the success of mental health programs in these areas. This situation indicates the need for research that can fill the gap, especially in the local context of Muna Regency. Therefore, an in-depth study of strategic leadership factors is needed to understand their impact on students' mental health in a more holistic way.

The lack of literature that focuses on the role of school principals as strategic leaders in the implementation of mental health programs in Muna Regency adds to the urgency of this research. Although some studies have addressed the importance of policy support in mental health programs, they often ignore the local context and sociocultural factors that influence their implementation (Gaol, 2017; Lestari, 2016). In fact, these local factors can be a key element of the program's success. Thus, this study aims to answer the gap through an in-depth exploration of the influence of strategic leadership on mental health programs in Muna District schools.

This research is important and urgent to be carried out considering the urgency of mental health as one of the main foundations in supporting the success of student education. Amid increasing challenges faced by students, such as academic pressure and social dynamics, mental health programs in schools have a strategic role in creating a conducive learning environment. However, the success of the implementation of this program is highly dependent on the effectiveness of the principal's strategic leadership. Muna Regency as an area with unique social and cultural characteristics faces specific challenges, including limited human resources and minimal institutional support. Therefore, this study is expected to be a solution to the fundamental problem by identifying how strategic leadership can improve the effectiveness of the implementation of mental health programs. The findings will make a significant contribution to the development of more adaptive and effective leadership strategies

in supporting students' mental well-being. Therefore, this study aims to explore the influence of strategic leadership on the effectiveness of the implementation of mental health programs in Muna Regency schools. In addition, this study also aims to identify the elements in strategic leadership that have the most significant impact on the success of the program. With this approach, the research is expected to be able to provide relevant recommendations to improve the implementation of mental health programs in a sustainable manner. This research also aims to broaden the understanding of the importance of strategic leadership in the context of local education, so that it can be the basis for the formulation of policies that are more responsive to the needs of schools. The findings of this study will enrich the literature on the relationship between strategic leadership and students' mental health, as well as provide practical solutions that can be implemented in Muna Regency.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted using a qualitative descriptive research design to describe the influence of strategic leadership on mental health programs in Muna Regency schools. This design was chosen because it is able to reveal phenomena in depth and understand the social context that occurs in the field (Fitriantini et al., 2019). This approach allows data to be collected through observation and direct interviews with informants who have a strategic role in the implementation of the program. The focus of the research is directed at exploring the processes, challenges, and impacts that arise in the implementation of mental health programs. The results obtained provide a systematic picture of how strategic leadership contributes to the success of the program.

The instruments used in this study include semi-structured interview guides and field notes. The interview guide is designed to dig up in-depth information about leadership strategies, challenges faced, and the impact of mental health programs in schools (Sugiyono, 2017). The validity of the data is maintained through source triangulation by comparing information from various informants who play a role in the implementation of the program. Data collection was carried out by direct interviews with the Head of the Muna Regency Education and Culture Office and principals in several schools that were the subject of the research. The information collected is then processed and analyzed to obtain relevant conclusions.

The research procedure begins with the identification of key informants who are directly related to the implementation of mental health programs in schools. The initial stage is carried out by collecting primary data through in-depth interviews using interview guides that have been prepared. The data obtained is then supported by the analysis of documents related to mental health program policies in Muna Regency. Furthermore, the data was analyzed using a qualitative method with a thematic approach to identify the main patterns and themes (Miles and Huberman, 1994). The results of the analysis are systematically prepared to answer the research objectives in accordance with the design that has been set.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research Results

The results of this study show that strategic leadership has a significant influence on the implementation of mental health programs in Muna Regency schools. Based on an interview with the Head of the Muna Regency Education and Culture Office, it is known that mental health programs have been integrated into the curriculum and extracurricular activities in schools. However, its implementation faces major obstacles in the form of limited human resources, including lack of training for teachers and parents' understanding of the importance of mental health. The Head of the Education Office emphasized that "strategic leadership is

essential, especially to ensure that all parties, from principals to teachers, have the same vision in supporting students' mental health." This shows that the role of leadership in building synergy between various stakeholders is the key to the success of the program.

The implementation of mental health programs at the school level shows a variety of strategies implemented by school principals. For example, the Principal of UPTD SMP Negeri 1 Kabawo explained that the formation of a counseling team at school and the involvement of homeroom teachers have helped monitor student welfare more effectively. In addition, these principals ensure that teachers receive mental health-related training, which contributes to improved communication between students, teachers, and parents. This is in line with the informant's statement that "there has been an improvement in student behavior, such as fewer cases of bullying and decreased absenteeism," which reflects the positive impact of the program on the school environment.

Leadership priorities in creating an environment that supports mental health are also the main concern of the Principal of UPTD SMP Negeri 1 Kontukowuna. This informant stated that the main focus is "building a supportive environment, where students feel safe to share their problems." In addition, parental involvement through seminars and special consultation sessions is a strategic step that helps increase public understanding of students' mental health. The informant also highlighted the importance of government support in the form of teacher training and the procurement of mental health experts to increase the effectiveness of the program.

Strategic leadership is also seen in efforts to motivate teachers to support mental health programs. The Principal of UPTD SMP Negeri 1 Loghia revealed that rewarding active teachers and providing time for training are the main strategies in increasing teacher participation. These informants assessed the success of the program based on student satisfaction surveys and disciplinary case data, which indicates that the program is starting to have a positive impact. However, the challenge in the form of a lack of professional counselors is one of the main obstacles, which demands a greater role from teachers in supporting students' mental health.

In addition, a community-based approach is applied by the Principal of UPTD SMP Negeri 1 Bone, which involves senior students as mentors for junior students. This approach is considered effective in building solidarity between students and supporting their mental well-being. The principal emphasized the importance of strategic leadership roles in ensuring that all teachers have the same understanding regarding student welfare priorities. Furthermore, the expectation of an increase in the budget for teacher training and the procurement of counseling facilities in schools is an important recommendation to support the sustainability of the program.

Overall, the results of this study show that strategic leadership has a significant contribution in overcoming various challenges in the implementation of mental health programs in schools. Each principal has a unique approach tailored to local needs and contexts. However, support from local governments, especially in the form of training and procurement of experts, remains a crucial element to increase the effectiveness of this program. This study provides an overview that the success of mental health programs depends not only on policy, but also on strategic leadership abilities to manage resources and build effective collaboration.

Table of Research Results on Strategic Leadership and Mental Health Programs in Muna Regency

| Informant | Key Strategies | Challenge | Impact |
|--|--|--|---|
| Head of the Muna Regency Education and Culture Office (R.R.) | Integration of mental health in curricula and extracurricular activities | Limited human resources and lack of teacher training | Awareness is increasing but implementation is limited |

| Informant | Key Strategies | Challenge | Impact |
|---|--|---|---|
| Principal of UPTD SMP Negeri 1 Kabawo (N.T.) | Formation of counseling teams and involvement of homeroom teachers | Communication with parents is less than optimal | Improvement of student behavior and reduction of bullying cases |
| Principal of UPTD SMP Negeri 1 Kontukowuna (M.M.) | Building a supportive and engaging environment for parents | Lack of training for teachers and mental health professionals | The school environment becomes more supportive |

The table above summarizes the main findings of this study based on interviews with various informants. Here is a detailed breakdown of the results:

1. Implementation of Mental Health Programs

Mental health programs have been integrated into the curriculum and extracurricular activities in Muna Regency schools. The Head of the Muna Regency Education and Culture Office explained that this initiative aims to increase the awareness of students and teaching staff on the importance of mental health. However, the limitations of human resources, including the lack of training for teachers, are the main challenges. This integration is expected to encourage synergy between stakeholders to create a supportive educational environment. As an initial impact, awareness about mental health began to increase even though its implementation was still limited.

2. Strategies at the School Level

Each principal adopts different strategies to support students' mental health. For example, the Principal of UPTD SMP Negeri 1 Kabawo formed a school counseling team and involved homeroom teachers for periodic monitoring. This approach not only improves student well-being but also improves communication patterns with parents. Data shows a decrease in bullying cases and student absenteeism. This strategy reflects how strategic leadership at the school level can significantly improve students' mental well-being.

3. Parent and Community Engagement

The Principal of UPTD SMP Negeri 1 Kontukowuna emphasized the importance of parental involvement in supporting mental health programs. Seminars and consultation sessions are an important step to increase parents' awareness of students' mental health. A supportive school environment is also a top priority. However, the lack of training for teachers and the absence of mental health experts are obstacles in the optimal implementation of this program. This shows the need for increased collaboration between schools and the government to meet these needs.

4. Motivation and Support for Teachers

Teachers have an important role to play in supporting mental health programs, especially in the midst of a limited number of professional counselors. The Principal of UPTD SMP Negeri 1 Loghia gave awards to teachers who actively contributed and ensured they had access to training. In addition, student satisfaction surveys are used to evaluate the success of the program. Higher teacher participation has had a positive impact on student motivation, although the challenge of a lack of professional counselors is still a major obstacle.

5. A Community Approach to Student Well-Being

The community-based approach implemented by the Principal of UPTD SMP Negeri 1 Bone has proven to be effective. Senior students are involved as mentors for junior students, building solidarity and supporting mental well-being collectively. The principal emphasized the importance of ensuring all teachers have the same understanding of mental health. Solidarity between students is one of the positive impacts of this approach. However, the need for increased budgets for training and counseling facilities remains a priority recommendation.

6. Local Government Support and Recommendations

The role of local governments is urgently needed to increase the effectiveness of mental health programs in Muna Regency. The principal proposed an increase in the budget for teacher training and the procurement of mental health experts. In addition, the provision of counseling facilities in schools will help overcome the current resource limitations. These findings show that collaboration between the government, schools, and the community is key in creating sustainable mental health programs.

Discussion

The results of this study revealed an unexpected finding, namely the success of mental health programs in Muna Regency which largely depends on the creativity and initiative of school principals in overcoming resource limitations. For example, the Principal of UPTD SMP Negeri 1 Bone uses a community-based approach by involving senior students as mentors for junior students. This approach has not been widely discussed in the previous literature but has shown effectiveness in increasing student solidarity. Previous research such as those revealed by Rahabav (2024) and Solihah (2024) has highlighted more of the role of formal policy and teacher training as the main solution, without exploring this innovative method. Thus, this study provides a new perspective that local adaptation in accordance with socio-cultural characteristics can be an effective solution to overcome resource limitations.

The strategy of awarding active teachers, as implemented at UPTD SMP Negeri 1 Loghia, is also an interesting finding. This is in contrast to previous studies that have highlighted formal training as the only way to increase teacher participation (Fitriantini et al., 2019; Saude et al., 2020). The awards given have been proven to increase teachers' motivation to actively participate in mental health programs. This strategy is in line with the concept of participatory management put forward by Lestari (2016), which shows that non-material rewards can be a significant motivation driver. Thus, these findings reinforce the importance of a flexible approach tailored to local needs.

Parent involvement through seminars and consultations is also a strategic step that has proven effective in increasing public understanding of the importance of students' mental health. Previous research by Santika (2021) revealed that the lack of support from parents is often the main obstacle to the implementation of mental health programs. However, a proactive approach such as the one applied at UPTD SMP Negeri 1 Kontukowuna shows that parental involvement can be achieved through structured educational efforts. These results are in line with the findings of Purnama et al. (2021), which highlight the importance of the role of the family in supporting students' mental well-being. Thus, these findings reinforce the argument that a collaborative approach involving all stakeholders is key to the success of the program.

This study also shows that the integration of mental health in the curriculum and extracurricular activities in Muna Regency schools has succeeded in increasing student awareness of the issue. However, obstacles in the form of limited human resources remain a significant challenge. These findings are consistent with previous research by Nurochim (2020), which showed that policies without adequate resource support are often ineffective. Nonetheless, the integration strategy implemented in Muna Regency shows that this step can be a good initial foundation to gradually increase the effectiveness of the program. Thus, this study highlights the need for continued support from local governments to complement this initial step.

Compared to previous research, this study provides a new view of the importance of a strategic leadership-based approach at the school level. Most previous studies such as those revealed by Fitriantini et al. (2019) and Gaol (2017) emphasized more on macro policy approaches without paying attention to the micro role of school principals as the main drivers.

This research shows that school principals with a strategic vision are able to utilize limited resources to create a positive impact. Thus, this study expands the understanding of how the role of school principals can be key in bridging the gap between policy and implementation.

These findings provide an answer to existing research gaps by showing that strategic leadership can address various challenges in the implementation of mental health programs. By identifying specific elements such as teacher appreciation, community-based approaches, and parent involvement, the study offers practical solutions that are relevant to the local context of Muna Regency. These findings also highlight the importance of continuous support from local governments in the form of teacher training and the procurement of mental health experts. Thus, this research not only makes a theoretical contribution but also has practical implications that can be a reference for the development of education policies in other regions.

This study broadens the understanding of the role of strategic leadership in the context of mental health program implementation by highlighting the importance of school principals' adaptability to local constraints. The community-based approach adopted by some principals shows that horizontal collaboration between students and teachers can create innovative solutions, despite limited resources. These findings challenge previous understandings, which focused on vertical support such as government policies or teacher training as the only way to improve program effectiveness (Rahabav, 2024). This argument is reinforced by Heifetz's adaptive leadership theory (1994), which emphasizes the need for a leader to adjust strategies based on the specific challenges faced. Thus, these findings enrich the literature on leadership effectiveness in educational settings by adding a dimension of local adaptability.

In addition, the results of this study emphasize the importance of a deep understanding of school organizational culture in the implementation of mental health programs. Previous research by Santika (2021) showed that resistance to change often appears in the educational environment due to a lack of understanding or trust in new programs. However, school principals in Muna Regency have succeeded in utilizing local cultural values such as mutual cooperation to support the success of the program. These findings support Hofstede's (1980) opinion that cultural context plays an important role in determining the effectiveness of organizational strategies. By understanding and leveraging the characteristics of local cultures, principals can build stronger collective support for mental health programs.

Furthermore, the approach of appreciation to teachers applied by school principals in Muna Regency highlights the importance of non-material recognition as a motivational tool. This approach expands Herzberg's (1959) theory of work motivation, which states that motivator factors such as rewards and recognition can improve job satisfaction and individual performance. In this context, the awards given to teachers have managed to increase their involvement in mental health programs, although resource limitations remain an obstacle. This shows that school leaders can make a significant impact even without great material support, as long as they are able to recognize the psychological needs of their staff.

The study also shows that a collaborative approach with parents can be an effective strategy to overcome resistance to mental health programs in the community. These findings challenge previous arguments, such as those expressed by Purnama et al. (2021), which stated that parental involvement is often difficult to achieve due to busyness or lack of awareness. However, through proactive education and consultation, school principals in Muna Regency have succeeded in changing parents' views on the importance of mental health. This approach reinforces the concept of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) theory of social ecology, which emphasizes that changes at the individual level can only be achieved if they are supported by a supportive social environment.

This research also provides a new insight into how human resource limitations can be overcome through participatory management strategies. Although the lack of professional counselors in Muna Regency is a major challenge, school principals have managed to take

advantage of the potential of teachers to take a role in supporting students' mental health. This approach is in line with Armstrong's (2006) human resource management theory, which emphasizes that staff training and empowerment can improve the overall effectiveness of an organization. By ensuring that teachers have a basic understanding of mental health, principals create internal support systems that can function despite limited external resources.

Overall, the findings of this study highlight the need for a multidimensional approach in the implementation of mental health programs in schools. Success is not only determined by one factor, such as policy or resources, but also by the principal's ability to capitalize on opportunities, overcome obstacles, and build synergies with various stakeholders. These findings support the complexity argument of Mintzberg (1979), which states that the success of an organization is determined by the dynamic interaction between the structure, strategy, and context of the environment. As such, this study not only confirms the importance of strategic leadership in education but also broadens the understanding of how such leadership can be applied effectively in a variety of local contexts.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that strategic leadership has a significant influence on the implementation of mental health programs in Muna Regency schools. Adaptive and innovative school principals are able to overcome resource limitations through various strategies, such as community-based approaches, teacher rewards, and parent involvement. While challenges remain, such as a lack of professional counsellors and government support, these findings suggest that school leaders have a key role to play in bridging the gap between policy and implementation of mental health programs. These findings not only broaden the theoretical understanding of the importance of strategic leadership in education but also provide relevant practical solutions to be applied in other areas with similar conditions. Thus, this research makes a meaningful contribution in improving students' mental well-being and supporting the development of inclusive and sustainable education.

Theoretically, these findings reinforce the concepts of adaptive leadership and participatory management in the context of education, suggesting that an organization's success depends on its leaders' ability to adapt strategies to local challenges. In practical terms, this study provides guidelines for school principals and other stakeholders to utilize the potential resources available more effectively. These findings are also relevant for policymakers, who can use the results of this study as a basis for designing teacher training, strengthening the role of school counselors, and allocating resources more optimally. With this solution, this research not only advances the understanding of strategic leadership in education but also has a direct impact that can improve the quality of mental health programs in schools.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This research has several limitations, especially related to the geographical focus that only covers Muna Regency and the qualitative method that is exploratory. Future research is suggested to expand the scope of the region in order to identify broader patterns in the implementation of mental health programs in different regions. In addition, quantitative research with a statistical approach can be used to objectively measure the relationship between specific elements in strategic leadership and the success of mental health programs. Further research can also explore the role of local government policies in more depth, especially in the provision of resources and supporting facilities.

The researcher also suggests further exploration of the involvement of local communities and cultures in supporting mental health programs. Cross-disciplinary approaches, such as the integration between strategy management, educational psychology, and sociology, can provide a more comprehensive understanding. By focusing on global challenges such as pandemics or rapid social change, future research can also examine how strategic leadership can deal with crises affecting students' mental health. With this direction, it is hoped that knowledge in this field can continue to develop and make a greater contribution to improving the quality of education and student welfare.

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