



Analysis of Effective Principal Leadership Based on Trait Approach in Improving Education Quality

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Abstract: This research aims to analyze the leadership traits of effective school principals in improving the quality of education. The method used in this research was a mixed method with qualitative and quantitative approaches. The subjects of this research were principals, teachers, and education personnel in Semarang Regency. Data collection techniques used questionnaires and in-depth interviews. Quantitative data were analyzed using percentage and categorical, while qualitative data were analyzed using an interactive model, including data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The results of this study indicated that the personality traits of effective principals in improving the quality of education include: aspects of intelligence in the high category (85%), aspects of self-confidence (85%), persistence (88%), integrity (90%), and agreeableness (94%) included in the very high category. The findings of this study showed that principals' personality traits could change when dealing with senior teachers when the principal's tenure is coming to an end, when they are transferred or when they are about to retire.

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Introduction

Improving the quality of education in schools is closely related to the success of the principal's leadership. The principal is one of the components of education that plays the most role in improving the quality of education. The effective leadership of school principals is very influential in improving the quality of education (Ansar, 2021; Paquita Paquita et al., 2021; Sari & Giatman, 2021). According to (Yulk, 2013), leadership effectiveness is indicated by the extent to which the organizational units carry out their duties successfully and achieve their goals. Success in achieving educational goals indicates an increase in the quality of education (Anggraini, Meldyana; Khamidi, 2021). Meanwhile, according to (Hadari, Nawawi & Hadari, Martini, 2004) effective leadership is a varied process, because the leader's personality traits influence it in realizing human relations with the people he leads.

One of the success factors of principal leadership can be seen in the leader's personality traits from birth. The trait theory of leadership states that personality traits influence the emergence and effectiveness of leaders (Colbert et al., 2012). Trait theory, also known as the "great man" theory, believes that great people are born with great traits as leaders, and only these great people have these traits (Northouse, Peter, 2019). The trait approach tries to understand leadership based on the belief that good leaders have "innate characteristics" from birth concerning physical and personality traits (Verawati & Hartono, 2020). *Trait leadership theory* is a view or opinion that says that a leader's effectiveness is largely determined by the traits or character possessed by the leader (van Woerkom &



Meyers, 2019). Trait theory believes leaders are born with inherent characteristics such as courage, intelligence, strength, initiative, and responsibility.

According to (Northose, Peter, 2019) there are 5 main traits of effective leadership, namely: 1) Intelligence, 2) Self-confidence, 3) Persistence, 4) Integrity, and 5) Agreeableness. Gardner, (1989), Fleenor, (2006) concluded that several personality traits emerge to make a leader successful. These traits include the following: (1) Physical vitality and stamina, (2) Action-oriented intelligence and judgment, (3) Desire to accept responsibility, (4) Task competence, (5) Understanding of followers and their needs, (6) Skill in dealing with others, (7) Need for achievement, (8) Capacity to motivate people, (9) Courage and resolution, (10) Trustworthiness, (11) Assertiveness, (12) Self-confidence, and (13) Adaptability/flexibility. Meanwhile, according to Gibson, Tesone, & Buchalski (2000) states that effective leadership can be formed by controlling the following personal traits: (1) spirit level (energy); (2) self-confidence; (3) stress resistance; (4) emotional maturity; (5) integrity; (6) extroversion; (7) motivation; (8) leading orientation; (9) the need for people who excel; (10) self-efficacy; (11) interpersonal skills; (12) cognitive; and (13) conceptual ability.

A school principal certainly has effective traits as an educational leader to successfully improve the work ethic and performance of teachers and employees so that it can lead the school he leads to become a quality school. The higher the value of the traits/personality of the leader, the higher the employees' work ethic (Ishak & Hulukati, 2020), employee performance (Khamzah, et al, 2015), and the effectiveness of education personnel to achieve organizational goals. The results of research (Colbert et al., 2012) (Hamid, 2010) show a positive correlation between leadership traits and effectiveness; the traits possessed include personality, physical excellence, and social abilities. Traits as personal factors that influence leadership success are found in research (Aliekperova & Aliekperov, 2023) recognizing the importance of effective leadership traits such as passion, effectiveness, confidence, determination, and the ability to take risks, courtesy, leadership ethics, and leadership style. Likewise, Danlami Hayyo's research (2020) showed that the personality traits of school principals affect the effectiveness of their leadership, including characteristics such as novelty, sociability, courtesy, self-confidence, and self-esteem.

In the preliminary study through interviews with teachers and principals, it was said that some personality traits of the principal were very influential in the success of his leadership to achieve goals and improve the quality of education, such as physical stamina, hard work, confidence and agreeableness. On the other hand, with time, there are changes such as physical stamina decreasing, and lack of enthusiasm, and on the contrary, self-confidence is increasing. However, it tends to be negative because trust in subordinates decreases, so it often does not involve teachers in decision-making. It is in line with the results of research (Zhang, 2023), showing that although trait theory is feasible in some cases, there are still some limitations, one of which is the lack of consideration of the degree of traits that are very likely to lead to a partial understanding of the effects of traits on leadership. Likewise, according to Robbins, S. P., & Judge (2007), the fact that a person exhibits certain traits that indicate they will be a leader does not mean they will be successful in achieving organizational goals. Whereas research by (Gardner, 1989) and (Jakub Prochazka, Martin Vaculik, 2018), emphasizes mindfulness as a personality characteristic that affects leadership and leader effectiveness in various cultures and situations.

Based on research findings (Colbert et al., 2012; Ishak & Hulukati, 2020; Danlami Hayyo, 2020), there is an influence between leader traits and effective leadership in



improving the quality of education, but the kinds of leader traits vary for each finding. The findings of these studies also show that although leader traits affect effective leadership in improving the quality of education, it is necessary to consider the effect of leadership traits partially applied in various cultures and situations. This research focuses on analyzing 5 (five) main traits/characteristics of effective principal leadership according to (Northouse, Peter, 2019), including 1) Intelligence, 2) Self-confidence, 3) Persistence, 4) Integrity, and 5) Agreeableness. The objective of this study is to analyze the leadership traits of effective principals in improving the quality of education. The results of this study are expected to contribute to the development of principals' leadership personality traits that have an impact on the success and improvement of the quality of education.

Research Method

This research used the Mixed Methods method, which combines quantitative and qualitative methods to be used in a research activity. Therefore, the data were more comprehensive, valid, reliable and objective data (Sugiyono, 2014). The research subjects were principals, teachers, and education personnel. Quantitative data collection techniques used questionnaires distributed to elementary school teachers in Semarang Regency, randomly totalling 80 respondents. To analyze effective leadership with a trait approach, respondents gave responses based on perceptions or assessments of statements about the traits of the principal using a Likert scale (Sugiyono, 2018), which included 1 = Strongly Disagree (STS), 2 = Disagree (TS), 3 = Undecided (R), 4 = Agree (S), 5 = Strongly Agree (SS). Qualitative data collection techniques used in-depth interviews with principals, teachers and education personnel. The following is a matrix of effective leadership instruments with a trait approach:

Table 1. Matrix of Effective Leadership Analysis Instrument with Trait Approach

No	Main Topic	Indicator	Instrument Number
1	Intelligence	Intelligent in decision-making, problem-solving and action, and insightful	1 - 5
2	Confidence	Believes in his/her own abilities and does not hesitate	4 – 5
3	Persistence	Diligent and hardworking, stay focused on the goal despite doubts, be determined, act with firmness and certainty.	6 – 9
4	Integrity	Trustworthy, inspiring confidence, consistent, reliable, showing tolerance, tactful and sympathetic	10 -13
5	Agreeableness	Easy to get along with, gets along well with others, shows kindness and warmth	14 - 16

(Source: Peter G. Northouse, 2019)

Quantitative data analysis techniques in this study, researchers determined the percentage and categories shown in Table 2 below.



Table 2: Criteria for Effective Leadership with a trait approach

Average Score	Category
86 - 100	Excellent
76 - 85	High
66 - 75	Sufficient
56 - 65	Less High
< 55	Poor

Qualitative data analysis techniques are carried out in three stages, namely: (1) data reduction, (2) data presentation, and (3) conclusion drawing. (B. Miles, M., & Huberman, 2014).

Results and Discussion

The data from the questionnaire on respondents' perceptions or responses to the principal's effective leadership traits instrument presented are shown in the following table.

Table 3. Data on Respondents' Perceptions of the Principal's Effective Leadership Traits

No	Aspects of Effective Leadership Traits	%	Category
1	Intelligence	85	High
	1) Intelligent in decision-making and action	84	High
	2) Smart in solving problems	83	High
	3) Insightful	88	Excellent
2	Confidence	85	Tinggi
	1) Believe in personal abilities	84	High
	2) No hesitation	86	Excellent
3	Persistence	88	Excellent
	1) Diligent and hardworking	87	Excellent
	2) Stay focused on the goal despite doubts	90	Excellent
	3) Determined	89	Excellent
	4) Act firmly and decisively	85	High
4	Integrity	90	Excellent
	1) Trustworthy	91	Excellent
	2) Inspire trust	88	Excellent
	3) Consistent, reliable	87	Excellent
	4) Show tolerance, tact and sympathy	92	Excellent
5	Agreeableness	94	Excellent
	1) Easy to get along with,	93	Excellent
	2) Get along well with others	94	Excellent
	3) Show kindness and warmth	93	Excellent

The data in the table above shows that, in general, the principal's effective leadership traits are very high on average. In the aspect of intelligence, the average category is high (85%), which includes intelligence in making decisions, solving problems, and broad-mindedness. In the aspect of self-confidence, the average is in the high category (85%), including confidence in one's abilities and freedom from doubt. In the aspect of persistence,

the average category is excellent (88%), which includes being diligent and hardworking, staying focused on goals despite doubts, being determined, and acting firmly and surely. Regarding integrity, the average in the excellent category (90%) includes being trustworthy, inspiring trust, consistent and reliable, showing tolerance, wise and sympathetic. Regarding agreeableness, the average in the excellent category (94%) includes being easy to get along with, getting along well with others, and showing kindness and warmth.

The following diagram shows the results of the questionnaire regarding respondents' (teachers') perceptions of the five main aspects of the principal's effective leadership traits.



Figure 1: Diagram of Respondents' Perceptions of the Principal's Effective Leadership Traits

Based on the diagram above, it appears that the most prominent or highest effective leadership traits of school principals are agreeableness, then integrity and persistence. The aspects of confidence and intelligence received the same perception in the high category.

Qualitative data based on interviews with school principals (KS), teachers (GR) and education personnel (TK) about the traits that support effective leadership in improving the quality of education:

(KS1): "I always reprimand teachers and employees in a friendly manner so that they feel comfortable and can be persuasively communicated with in every decision-making process".

(KS2): "As principal, I strongly emphasize the traits of enthusiasm, hard work, perseverance, love of learning, understanding of technology, loyalty and dedication".

(GR1): "According to my observations, the principal of the school where I work has effective leadership traits that are nurturing and friendly but reliable because he has intelligence."

(GR2): "I see that an effective principal listens to teachers' difficulties and problems and helps solve them".

(GR3): "My principal is patient in dealing with various teacher characters but firm in making decisions".

(TK1): "Decisions are agreed upon, always implemented, and not favored by one teacher".

(TK2): "The principal is very kind, friendly, open and wise in making decisions, and easy to share experiences with anyone".

(TK3): "My principal is friendly, sociable and gets along well, and always shows care, kindness and warmth which I crave".



In addition to the traits of the principal that support leadership effectiveness, according to the observations of teachers and education personnel, there are several traits of the principal that do not support effective leadership in improving the quality of education:

(GR1): "In giving decisions always thrown to subordinates".

(GR2): "Sometimes in making decisions, they hesitate due to personal conditions, often feel sorry, do not have the heart to reprimand teachers, are less assertive with more senior colleagues, and are too careful".

(GR3): "I experience that sometimes the principal gives sudden instructions so that I am not ready to work on them".

(GR4): "The principal's leadership traits that I observe are ineffective such as being easily offended, not accepting criticism and input".

(TK1): "Because of the principal's pity for teachers/employees this makes the decision less fair".

(TK2): "I feel and observe that sometimes the principal's good qualities drop when dealing with seniors, he is not as assertive as before but hesitant to reprimand, or when he is about to retire or want to be rolled out, he becomes less enthusiastic and less committed".

Based on the results of the interviews above, some personality traits of school principals that are effective in improving the quality of education include intelligence, confidence, persistence, integrity, and agreeableness. Conversely, there are some personality traits of principals that are not effective in improving the quality of education, including lack of responsibility, hesitation in making decisions, too careful in making decisions, low intelligence, irritability, lack of persistence, unfairness, and indecisiveness.

Discussion

In this study, it is found that 5 (five) aspects of the main traits of effective leadership that, according to teachers' perceptions, strongly support the success of leadership in schools, namely: 1) Aspects of intelligence, 2) The aspect of self-confidence, 3) The aspect of persistence, 4) The aspect of integrity, and 5) The aspect of agreeableness is in line with the theory (Northose, Peter, 2019). This is supported by the theory of leadership traits stating that personality traits affect the emergence and effectiveness of leaders (Colbert et al., 2012). The 5 main aspects of effective leadership traits are very instrumental in improving the quality of education, as research (Ansar, 2021; Paquita Paquita et al., 2021; Sari & Giatman, 2021) states that effective leadership greatly affects the quality of education.

Aspects of the principal's intelligence such as intelligence in making decisions are very important in carrying out effective leadership, as the opinion (Thompson, 2010) and research (Hallo et al., 2020), that the ability to make good and timely decisions is a trait of a good leader. Principals as "leaders" or leaders in schools must have the ability to make quick and precise decisions, and be smart in applying approaches that are appropriate to the existing conditions, both rationally and emotionally (Christie G. Mewengkang, 2021). Decision-making intelligence is closely related to intelligence in solving problems, because decision-making is a series of activities carried out by a person in an effort to solve the problems being faced and then determine various alternatives that are considered the most rational and in accordance with the environment (Siswanto, 2015) so that they are smart in acting. In addition, a broad-minded principal is very important in carrying out effective leadership (Rustamadji, 2020).



Aspects of self-confidence such as belief in his/her own abilities and freedom from doubt are essential in exercising effective leadership. This is one of the leadership traits according to (Stogdill, 1974), identify a number of traits that are often considered important in leadership, such as intelligence, initiative, openness, sense of humor, enthusiasm, honesty, sympathy, and self-confidence. According to (Yulk, 2013), some traits that are considered important in the success of a leader include intelligence, confidence, perseverance, integrity, and sociability. According to (Rue, L.W. & Byars, 2000), leadership traits that are desirable in many situations include confidence, mental and physical strength, enthusiasm, a sense of responsibility, and empathy and rapport with others. A confident leader is able to make decisions firmly and confidently, while mental and physical strength helps the leader to deal with pressure and challenges in making decisions.

Aspects of persistence such as being diligent and hardworking, staying focused on the goal despite doubts, being determined, acting with high decisiveness and certainty are essential in exercising effective leadership. Persistence exhibits resource qualities that are associated with outstanding leadership in various fields (Merriman, 2017). Therefore, persistence is an important trait that a leader must possess to achieve success (Duckworth, Angela L., & Quinn, 2009). Besides being hardworking, a leader must be decisive and enforce rules to achieve company goals (Arianto & Setiyowati, 2020).

Aspects of integrity such as being trustworthy, inspiring trust, being consistent, reliable, showing tolerance, being wise and being highly sympathetic are very important in carrying out effective leadership. Integrity, fairness and responsibility (Setyawan et al., 2022). Honesty, Competence, Responsibility and future orientation are the 4 (four) traits most admired by subordinates (Yuliana & Widayati, 2018). As a leader, the principal must have high integrity and be open, so that teachers, staff and students can feel that there are no boundaries between them and the principal (Christie G. Mewengkang, 2021). Integrity makes a leader trustworthy and respected by coworkers, employees, and customer, (Clark, R. C., & Mayer, 2003).

The aspects of agreeableness, sociability, getting along well with others, showing kindness and high warmth are very important in exercising effective leadership. Agreeableness according to (Graziano, W. G., Habashi, M. M., & Tobin, 2017). It describes the extent to which a person tends to be friendly, cooperative, and empathetic towards others. Some characteristics of people who have a high level of agreeableness are, tend to feel sympathy and care for others, have a friendly and polite attitude in interacting with others, tend to avoid conflict and try to maintain harmonious relationships with others, show a cooperative attitude and are ready to help others, more easily trust others and less skeptical. A friendly school principal is very supportive of effective leadership in improving the quality of education.

In addition to the findings of 5 (five) principal leadership traits that support effectiveness in schools, there are findings of several principal traits that are considered less supportive of ineffective leadership, such as sometimes making decisions hesitating due to personal conditions, often feeling sorry, not having the heart to reprimand teachers, less assertive with more senior colleagues, and too careful, in giving decisions always thrown to subordinates, giving instructions is impromptu, easily offended, less accepting of criticism and input, making decisions less fair, not involving teachers in making decisions and sometimes their traits change due to certain situations and conditions, such as when dealing with seniors, personal reasons, and approaching retirement. It is in line with the opinion of (Bolden, R., Gosling, J., Marturano, A. and Dennison, 2003), who mapped out negative and



ineffective leadership traits, including lack of commitment, reactive, not involving subordinates in decision-making, emotional, irrational, temperament, unclear and confusing communication.

Theoretical implications of 5 (five) main traits/characters of effective principal leadership according to Northose, Peter (2019), these personality traits include intelligence, confidence, persistence, integrity, and agreeableness can underlie the development of effective leadership traits in improving organizational quality. Therefore, the research findings practically have implications for principal leadership that effective leadership in improving education quality requires principals with personality traits such as high intelligence, confidence, persistence, integrity and friendliness (Arianto & Setiyowati, 2020).

Conclusion

Based on the results and discussion above, it can be concluded that elementary school principals in Semarang Regency have 5 main characteristics of effective leadership in implementing leadership in schools, including 1) Intelligence (85%), 2) Self-confidence (85%), 3) Persistence (88%), 4) Integrity (90%), and 5) Friendliness (94%). The 5 leadership traits greatly support the success of the principal's leadership in improving the quality of education. However, the traits of the principal are sometimes temporary; there are times when teachers feel that, at a certain time, there are less effective traits supporting the success of leadership due to certain situations and reasons. So, some leader traits can change due to certain conditions and situations; for example, when dealing with seniors, assertiveness becomes weak for personal reasons, sometimes hesitating to make decisions, or because approaching retirement, hard work and commitment decreases.

Recommendation

Recommendations are made for school principals to maintain and hone effective leadership traits that contribute to improving the quality of education. Difficulties and problems in reducing effective leadership traits need to be overcome by improving leadership skills. Recommendations for school supervisors need to assist and provide guidance to school principals who are in the period before retirement, or before the end of the principal's term of office so that effective leadership traits remain stable and there is no decline. Recommendations for the Education Office, leadership traits can be used to find the right people (recruitment) in the organization, because with personality assessment instruments, organizations can identify the traits and personalities of prospective principals. The right person will be selected and assumed to increase school effectiveness. In addition, it is used as a personal understanding and development.

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