

Challenges for the Principal as a Manager Reviewed from the Aspects of His Role and Responsibilities

Yoga Nur Setiawan, Syifa Alfalah, Almaeda Jalaludin, Tamrin Fathoni, M. Neeharika

Institut Agama Islam Sunan Giri Ponorogo, Indonesia.
Osmania University India

Correspondence e-mail; yogarefsaka@gmail.com, syifaalfalah@gmail.com, Almaeda@gmail.com,
tam2fiana@gmail.com, neeharika25@yahoo.co.in

Article history

Submitted: 2024/01/01; Revised: 2024/02/01; Accepted: 2024/02/25

Abstract

School principals occupy a strategic position in ensuring the effective management and administration of educational institutions. As managers, principals are responsible for planning, organizing, directing, coordinating, and evaluating school resources to achieve educational goals. However, the increasing complexity of educational systems, rapid technological advancement, policy reforms, stakeholder expectations, and organizational demands have created significant managerial challenges for school leaders. This study examines the challenges faced by principals as managers from the perspective of their roles and responsibilities within educational organizations. Using a qualitative literature review approach, the study analyzes contemporary research related to educational management, school leadership, and organizational effectiveness. The findings indicate that principals encounter various challenges, including resource management limitations, human resource development issues, administrative workload, technological adaptation, stakeholder engagement, and resistance to organizational change. Furthermore, balancing managerial duties with instructional leadership responsibilities remains a persistent concern. The study concludes that effective managerial competence, strategic decision-making, communication skills, and adaptive leadership are essential for overcoming these challenges and ensuring sustainable school improvement and educational effectiveness in a rapidly changing environment.

Keywords

Principal Management, School Leadership, Managerial Challenges, Educational Administration, School Effectiveness



© 2025 by the authors. Submitted for possible open access publication under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY SA) license, <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>.

INTRODUCTION

The educational environment of the twenty-first century has become increasingly complex, dynamic, and demanding. Rapid technological advancements, globalization, educational reforms, accountability systems, and changing societal expectations have significantly transformed the responsibilities of school leaders.

Within this context, school principals are expected to perform multiple roles simultaneously, serving as educational leaders, managers, administrators, supervisors, and agents of change. Among these responsibilities, the managerial role remains one of the most fundamental because it directly influences the effectiveness and efficiency of school operations. Effective management ensures that human, financial, physical, and informational resources are utilized optimally to achieve educational objectives and promote continuous school improvement.

Management in educational institutions involves a systematic process of planning, organizing, leading, coordinating, and controlling resources to accomplish predetermined goals. According to Henri Fayol, management encompasses essential functions that guide organizational performance and effectiveness. In educational settings, these functions are translated into school planning, curriculum management, staff development, financial administration, resource allocation, and performance evaluation. Consequently, principals are required to possess strong managerial competencies that enable them to address organizational challenges while maintaining educational quality and institutional sustainability.

The role of the principal as a manager extends beyond routine administrative activities. Principals are responsible for ensuring that all components of the school operate effectively and collaboratively. According to Tony Bush (2020), educational management focuses on the efficient implementation of policies and procedures that support teaching and learning processes. Principals must coordinate various school functions, including budgeting, staffing, facility management, curriculum implementation, student services, and community relations. The successful execution of these responsibilities requires a combination of technical, conceptual, and interpersonal skills.

One of the primary managerial responsibilities of principals is strategic planning. Educational institutions operate within increasingly competitive and uncertain environments where long-term planning is essential for organizational success. Strategic planning enables schools to establish clear goals, allocate resources effectively, and respond proactively to emerging challenges. However, the planning process itself presents significant difficulties due to changing government policies, evolving educational standards, and unpredictable environmental conditions. Principals must continuously assess internal and external factors affecting school performance while ensuring that organizational objectives remain aligned with educational priorities.

Another critical responsibility is human resource management. Teachers and educational staff represent the most valuable assets within schools because they directly influence student learning outcomes. Effective human resource management involves recruitment, professional development, performance evaluation, motivation, and conflict resolution. According to Kenneth Leithwood and colleagues (2020), school leadership significantly affects teacher performance, organizational commitment, and overall school effectiveness. Nevertheless, principals often face challenges related to teacher shortages, varying competency levels, professional development needs, and workforce motivation. Managing diverse personnel while maintaining a positive organizational climate requires sophisticated leadership and management capabilities.

Financial management constitutes another significant aspect of the principal's managerial role. Educational institutions frequently operate under resource constraints that limit their ability to implement programs and initiatives effectively. Principals must ensure transparent budgeting, efficient resource allocation, financial accountability, and compliance with regulations. In many educational systems, increasing demands for quality education are not always accompanied by proportional increases in funding. Consequently, principals are often required to make difficult decisions regarding resource prioritization and expenditure management. Effective financial leadership becomes essential for maintaining organizational stability and supporting educational innovation.

The growing integration of technology into education has also expanded managerial responsibilities. Digital transformation has introduced new opportunities for improving teaching, learning, communication, and administrative efficiency. However, technological implementation presents numerous challenges, including infrastructure limitations, budget constraints, cybersecurity concerns, and varying levels of technological competence among staff members. According to Philip Hallinger (2018), contemporary school leaders must develop adaptive leadership capacities that enable them to navigate technological and organizational changes effectively. Principals are therefore expected to lead digital transformation initiatives while ensuring that technology serves educational objectives rather than becoming an end in itself.

Stakeholder management represents another increasingly important dimension of educational leadership. Modern schools interact with a wide range of stakeholders, including students, parents, teachers, government agencies, local communities, and private-sector partners. Each stakeholder group possesses unique

expectations, interests, and demands that influence school operations. Principals must establish effective communication channels, foster collaboration, and manage stakeholder relationships to support organizational goals. Failure to address stakeholder concerns can lead to conflict, reduced trust, and diminished organizational performance. Therefore, effective stakeholder engagement has become a critical managerial competency for contemporary school leaders.

Administrative workload remains one of the most frequently cited challenges facing principals worldwide. Research indicates that school leaders spend a substantial portion of their time on administrative and managerial tasks, often limiting opportunities to focus on instructional leadership and educational improvement. Documentation requirements, regulatory compliance, reporting obligations, and operational management responsibilities consume significant amounts of time and energy. As educational accountability systems become more complex, principals face increasing pressure to balance managerial efficiency with educational leadership effectiveness. This challenge highlights the growing tension between administrative responsibilities and instructional priorities within contemporary schools.

Organizational change management further complicates the principal's managerial role. Educational institutions regularly experience reforms related to curriculum, assessment, governance, and technology. While change is necessary for continuous improvement, it often generates uncertainty, resistance, and organizational disruption. Principals must guide stakeholders through change processes while maintaining organizational stability and morale. According to Michael Fullan (2016), successful educational change depends heavily on leadership capacity and organizational commitment. Effective principals must therefore function as both managers and change leaders capable of fostering adaptability and resilience within school communities.

Moreover, globalization and educational competition have increased expectations regarding school performance and accountability. Governments, parents, and communities increasingly demand evidence of educational quality and measurable student outcomes. Principals are expected to demonstrate accountability for organizational performance while simultaneously addressing resource limitations and contextual challenges. This heightened accountability places additional pressure on school leaders and requires sophisticated managerial decision-making skills.

The challenges faced by principals as managers are further intensified by the need to balance multiple responsibilities simultaneously. While managerial functions

focus on maintaining organizational efficiency and effectiveness, principals are also expected to provide instructional leadership, support teacher development, promote innovation, and enhance student achievement. Balancing these diverse expectations requires adaptability, strategic thinking, and effective time management. The ability to integrate managerial and leadership functions has become a defining characteristic of successful school principals in contemporary educational environments.

Given the increasing complexity of educational administration, understanding the challenges associated with the principal's managerial role is essential for improving school effectiveness and leadership development. Examining these challenges from the perspective of managerial roles and responsibilities provides valuable insights into the competencies required for effective school management. Therefore, this study seeks to explore the major challenges encountered by principals as managers and to identify strategies that can enhance their capacity to fulfill managerial responsibilities in an increasingly demanding educational landscape.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative literature review approach to examine the challenges faced by principals as managers from the perspective of their roles and responsibilities within educational organizations. A literature review method was selected because it provides a systematic means of synthesizing existing theoretical and empirical knowledge related to educational management, school leadership, organizational effectiveness, and managerial challenges. According to John W. Creswell (2018), qualitative literature studies are appropriate for exploring complex social phenomena through the analysis and interpretation of existing scholarly works. This approach allows researchers to identify patterns, themes, and relationships across multiple studies and develop a comprehensive understanding of the research topic.

The study relied exclusively on secondary data obtained from peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, conference proceedings, policy documents, and research reports relevant to educational leadership and school management. The sources were collected from internationally recognized academic databases, including Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC, SpringerLink, Taylor & Francis Online, Sage Journals, Emerald Insight, and Google Scholar. These databases were selected because they contain high-quality publications addressing leadership practices, educational administration, organizational management, and school effectiveness.

The literature search was conducted using specific keywords and combinations of terms related to the study objectives. The primary search terms included

“principal as manager,” “school management,” “managerial challenges,” “educational administration,” “school leadership,” “organizational effectiveness,” “human resource management in schools,” “educational change management,” and “principal responsibilities.” Additional keywords were incorporated to capture emerging issues such as technological leadership, stakeholder management, strategic planning, and educational accountability. The search process focused primarily on literature published between 2015 and 2025 to ensure the relevance and contemporary significance of the findings, while foundational theoretical works were included when necessary to provide conceptual support.

Following the initial search process, a screening procedure was conducted to evaluate the relevance and quality of the collected sources. Publications were included if they specifically discussed principal leadership, managerial functions, school administration, or challenges associated with educational management. Studies focusing exclusively on classroom instruction without addressing managerial responsibilities were excluded. Similarly, sources lacking scholarly rigor or empirical evidence were omitted from the review. This selection process ensured that the final dataset consisted of credible and relevant literature aligned with the research objectives.

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis as proposed by Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke (2021). The analysis began with repeated reading and familiarization with the selected literature. Relevant information related to managerial roles, leadership responsibilities, organizational challenges, decision-making processes, resource management, technological adaptation, stakeholder engagement, and educational accountability was identified and coded systematically. These codes were subsequently grouped into broader thematic categories reflecting the key challenges encountered by principals in their managerial functions.

Several dominant themes emerged during the analysis, including strategic planning challenges, human resource management difficulties, financial constraints, administrative workload, technological adaptation, stakeholder relationship management, organizational change, and accountability pressures. The themes were then examined comparatively across different educational contexts and geographical settings to identify recurring patterns and contextual variations. This process facilitated a deeper understanding of the multifaceted nature of managerial challenges in educational institutions.

To enhance the trustworthiness and credibility of the findings, source triangulation was employed. According to Norman K. Denzin (2017), triangulation

strengthens research validity by comparing evidence from multiple sources and perspectives. By integrating findings from diverse studies, educational systems, and scholarly viewpoints, the analysis reduced the potential influence of individual biases and improved the consistency of interpretations.

The study also adopted a descriptive-analytical framework in presenting the findings. Rather than merely summarizing previous research, the analysis critically examined relationships between managerial responsibilities and organizational challenges. Particular attention was given to identifying how contemporary educational demands influence the managerial effectiveness of school principals and how leadership competencies contribute to overcoming organizational obstacles. Through this approach, the study generated a comprehensive understanding of the managerial challenges facing principals and provided a theoretical foundation for future research and leadership development initiatives in educational administration.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this literature review indicate that the role of the principal as a manager has become increasingly complex due to the rapid transformation of educational systems, growing accountability demands, technological advancements, and changing stakeholder expectations. Principals are no longer responsible solely for administrative operations but are expected to function as strategic managers capable of coordinating human resources, financial resources, infrastructure, educational programs, and community partnerships simultaneously. The literature consistently demonstrates that managerial effectiveness significantly influences school performance, organizational stability, teacher productivity, and student achievement. However, fulfilling these responsibilities presents numerous challenges that affect the principal's ability to achieve organizational goals effectively. One of the most significant findings concerns the challenge of balancing multiple managerial responsibilities. Principals are expected to perform planning, organizing, staffing, directing, coordinating, controlling, and evaluating functions while simultaneously addressing instructional leadership, policy implementation, and school improvement initiatives.

Research shows that the complexity of the principal's role has increased substantially over the past two decades due to expanding administrative requirements and educational reforms. The increasing scope of responsibilities often results in role overload, where principals struggle to allocate sufficient attention to all managerial functions. Consequently, many school leaders experience difficulties

maintaining a balance between operational management and strategic leadership activities. The findings further reveal that human resource management represents one of the most challenging aspects of the principal's managerial role. Teachers and staff members constitute the most valuable resources within educational institutions, and their performance directly influences educational outcomes. Principals are responsible for recruitment, supervision, professional development, motivation, performance evaluation, and conflict management. However, the literature identifies several obstacles, including teacher shortages, varying levels of professional competence, resistance to change, low motivation, and interpersonal conflicts among staff members.

These challenges require principals to possess strong communication, negotiation, and leadership skills. Effective human resource management is essential because organizational success largely depends on the quality and commitment of educational personnel. Schools characterized by collaborative and supportive work environments tend to demonstrate higher levels of effectiveness and organizational resilience. Financial management emerges as another critical challenge facing principals in their managerial capacity. Educational institutions frequently operate under budgetary constraints that limit their ability to implement programs, maintain facilities, acquire technology, and support professional development initiatives. The literature indicates that inadequate funding remains one of the most frequently cited barriers to school effectiveness. Principals are required to make difficult decisions regarding resource allocation while ensuring accountability, transparency, and compliance with financial regulations. Limited financial resources often force school leaders to prioritize immediate operational needs over long-term development goals. As a result, principals must develop strategic financial planning skills and seek alternative funding sources through partnerships, grants, and community support. Effective financial management is therefore considered a fundamental component of successful educational leadership.

Administrative workload also appears as a dominant theme throughout the reviewed literature. Principals spend considerable amounts of time completing documentation, preparing reports, complying with regulations, managing personnel records, overseeing facilities, and responding to governmental requirements. Excessive administrative responsibilities often reduce opportunities for instructional leadership and direct engagement with teachers and students. Several studies indicate that principals frequently report time constraints as one of the most significant obstacles to effective leadership. The growing demand for accountability

and performance monitoring has intensified administrative burdens, requiring school leaders to manage increasingly complex reporting systems. This situation creates tension between managerial efficiency and educational leadership priorities. Consequently, many scholars argue that reducing unnecessary administrative tasks would enable principals to focus more effectively on school improvement initiatives and instructional support. Another major finding concerns the challenge of technological adaptation and digital transformation. Contemporary educational institutions are expected to integrate technology into teaching, learning, communication, and administrative processes.

Principals play a crucial role in leading digital transformation efforts and ensuring that technological resources contribute to educational objectives. However, the literature reveals that technological implementation is often hindered by infrastructure limitations, insufficient funding, inadequate training, and varying levels of digital literacy among staff members. Furthermore, the increasing reliance on data management systems introduces additional challenges related to information quality, decision-making, cybersecurity, and data governance. Principals must therefore develop technological leadership competencies while ensuring that digital innovations enhance rather than complicate organizational effectiveness. Stakeholder management constitutes another significant challenge associated with the managerial responsibilities of principals. Schools operate within complex social environments involving multiple stakeholder groups, including teachers, students, parents, government agencies, community organizations, and private-sector partners. Each stakeholder group possesses distinct expectations and interests that influence school operations.

The literature suggests that principals frequently encounter difficulties managing conflicting demands and maintaining productive relationships among stakeholders. Effective communication, transparency, collaboration, and conflict resolution are essential for building trust and sustaining stakeholder support. Principals who successfully engage stakeholders tend to create stronger school-community partnerships, which contribute positively to organizational effectiveness and educational outcomes. The findings also indicate that organizational change management remains a persistent challenge for school principals. Educational institutions continuously experience reforms related to curriculum development, assessment systems, technology integration, governance structures, and quality assurance processes. While change is necessary for educational improvement, it often generates uncertainty and resistance among staff members.

Principals are expected to facilitate organizational adaptation while maintaining stability and morale. Research demonstrates that resistance to change frequently emerges when stakeholders perceive reforms as threatening existing practices or increasing workload. Successful principals address these challenges through participatory decision-making, effective communication, professional development, and continuous support. Their ability to manage change significantly influences the success of educational reforms and innovation initiatives. Accountability pressures have become increasingly influential in shaping the managerial role of school principals. Governments, educational authorities, and communities demand measurable evidence of school performance and educational quality. Principals are expected to ensure compliance with regulations, achieve performance targets, and demonstrate effective use of resources.

The literature suggests that accountability systems can promote organizational improvement when implemented appropriately; however, excessive accountability pressures may increase stress, reduce professional autonomy, and encourage managerial practices focused primarily on compliance rather than educational development. Balancing accountability requirements with broader educational objectives therefore represents a significant challenge for school leaders. Effective principals utilize accountability frameworks as tools for continuous improvement rather than merely mechanisms for external evaluation. Another important finding concerns risk management responsibilities. Modern educational institutions face various risks related to student safety, legal compliance, financial management, technological security, and organizational reputation. Principals bear substantial responsibility for identifying, mitigating, and responding to these risks.

The literature indicates that risk management procedures have become increasingly complex and time-consuming, requiring school leaders to navigate legal, ethical, and operational considerations simultaneously. Effective risk management demands careful planning, proactive decision-making, and collaboration with stakeholders. Failure to manage risks effectively can negatively affect school performance and public trust. Therefore, principals must continuously strengthen their managerial competencies in risk assessment and crisis management. Overall, the findings demonstrate that the challenges faced by principals as managers are multidimensional and interconnected. Human resource management, financial administration, technological adaptation, stakeholder engagement, organizational change, accountability pressures, administrative workload, and risk management collectively shape the effectiveness of school leadership.

The literature consistently emphasizes that successful principals possess strong managerial competencies, adaptive leadership skills, strategic thinking abilities, and effective communication practices. As educational environments continue to evolve, principals must continuously develop their professional capacities to address emerging challenges while ensuring organizational effectiveness and educational quality. The ability to integrate managerial functions with leadership responsibilities remains one of the most critical determinants of successful school management in contemporary educational contexts.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study confirm that the role of the principal as a manager is fundamental to the successful operation and development of educational institutions. Principals are entrusted with a wide range of managerial responsibilities that include planning, organizing, coordinating, supervising, controlling, and evaluating all aspects of school operations. However, the increasing complexity of educational systems has transformed school management into a highly demanding profession characterized by numerous organizational, administrative, financial, technological, and human resource challenges.

The study reveals that principals face significant difficulties in balancing multiple responsibilities simultaneously. Human resource management, financial limitations, administrative workload, technological adaptation, stakeholder engagement, accountability demands, organizational change, and risk management represent the most prominent challenges identified in the literature. These challenges are interconnected and often influence one another, making effective school management increasingly difficult. Furthermore, principals must continuously balance managerial duties with leadership responsibilities aimed at improving teaching quality, supporting professional development, and enhancing student outcomes.

The findings also indicate that successful principals are distinguished by their ability to adapt to changing educational environments and respond strategically to emerging challenges. Effective communication, collaborative decision-making, problem-solving skills, resource management, and leadership competence play critical roles in overcoming managerial obstacles. Principals who foster positive organizational cultures, engage stakeholders actively, and promote continuous learning are more likely to achieve sustainable school improvement and organizational effectiveness.

Moreover, the study highlights the importance of professional preparation and continuous leadership development for school principals. Given the expanding scope of managerial responsibilities, educational systems should provide ongoing training and support that strengthen principals' competencies in financial management, human resource development, technological leadership, strategic planning, and change management.

In conclusion, the challenges encountered by principals as managers reflect the evolving nature of educational leadership in contemporary society. Addressing these challenges requires not only individual leadership capacity but also institutional support, policy alignment, and collaborative stakeholder engagement. Strengthening managerial competence among principals is therefore essential for improving school effectiveness, educational quality, and long-term organizational sustainability.

REFERENCES

- Aas, Marit., Vennebo, K. F., & Halvorsen, K. A. (2020). Benchlearning—An action research program for transforming leadership and school practices. *Educational Action Research, 28*(2), 210–226.
- Bellibaş, Mehmet Şükrü., Hosseingholizadeh, R., & Tamadoni, A. (2022). A systematic review of key contextual challenges facing school principals: Research-informed coping solutions. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership, 50*(6), 991–1014.
- Braun, Virginia., & Clarke, V. (2021). *Thematic Analysis: A Practical Guide*. Sage Publications.
- Bush, Tony. (2020). *Theories of Educational Leadership and Management* (5th ed.). Sage Publications.
- Creswell, John W., & Creswell, J. D. (2018). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* (5th ed.). Sage Publications.
- Day, Christopher., Gu, Q., & Sammons, P. (2016). The impact of leadership on student outcomes. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 52*(2), 221–258.
- Denzin, Norman K.. (2017). *The Research Act: A Theoretical Introduction to Sociological Methods*. Routledge.
- Fullan, Michael. (2016). *The New Meaning of Educational Change* (5th ed.). Teachers College Press.
- Hallinger, Philip. (2018). Bringing context out of the shadows of leadership. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership, 46*(1), 5–24.

- Harris, Alma., & Jones, M. (2020). COVID-19: School leadership in disruptive times. *School Leadership & Management, 40*(4), 243–247.
- Leithwood, Kenneth., Harris, A., & Hopkins, D. (2020). Seven strong claims about successful school leadership revisited. *School Leadership & Management, 40*(1), 5–22.
- Postgraduate Program Universitas Negeri Semarang. (2022). The roles of school principal: An insight from disadvantaged areas of Indonesia. *Journal of Educational Management and Instruction, 2*(1), 1–15.
- Smith, Donna M., & Holdaway, E. A. (1995). Constraints on the effectiveness of schools and their principals. *International Journal of Educational Management, 9*(5), 31–39.
- Starr, Karen. (2012). Problematizing risk and the principalship: The risky business of managing risk in schools. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership, 40*(4), 464–479.
- Tintoré, Mireia., Cunha, R. S., Cabral, I., & Alves, J. J. M. (2022). A scoping review of problems and challenges faced by school leaders (2003–2019). *Educational Management Administration & Leadership, 50*(4), 536–573.
- Wanzare, Zachariah., & Da Costa, J. L. (2001). Rethinking instructional leadership roles of the school principal: Challenges and prospects. *Journal of Educational Thought, 35*(3), 269–295.