



Principals' Leadership Management in Primary School Education Based on a Literature Review

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Abstracts

Principals' leadership management plays a crucial role in shaping the quality of primary school education. Principals are expected not only to manage school administration but also to act as instructional leaders and agents of change who influence teaching and learning processes. This study aims to examine the implementation of principals' leadership management in planning, implementation, and evaluation of educational programs, the role of principals as instructional leaders in building school culture and enhancing teacher professionalism, and the challenges faced by principals and their impact on instructional quality in primary schools. This study employed a literature review method by analyzing relevant national and international journal articles and academic sources. Data were analyzed thematically to identify key concepts and research patterns. The findings indicate that leadership management functions have been implemented, although they remain largely administrative. Principals contribute to instructional improvement and teacher development; however, their practices are not consistently applied. Challenges such as limited managerial competence, heavy administrative workloads, and resource constraints hinder effective instructional leadership and equitable improvement in instructional quality. In conclusion, educational leadership research remains dominated by a small number of countries, underscoring the need for greater international representation to enhance its global relevance.

Keywords: Leadership Management; School Principals; Instructional Leadership; Primary Education



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1. Introduction

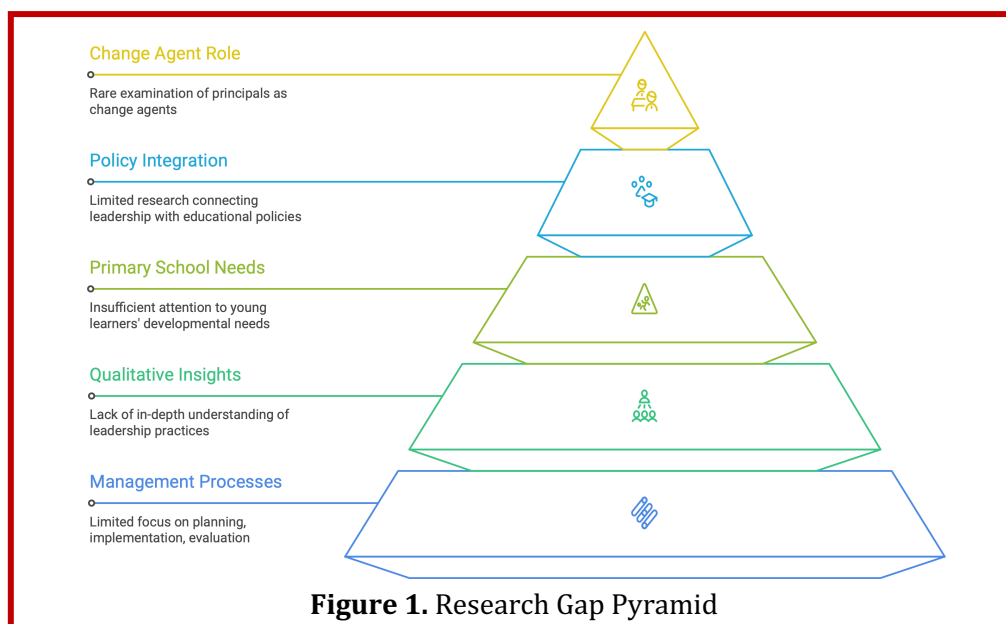
Principals' leadership management in primary school education refers to the systematic process of managing all school resources to achieve educational goals effectively and sustainably. Principals are not only responsible for administrative tasks but also serve as instructional leaders who are capable of formulating the school's vision, mission, and strategic policies. In the primary school context, principals' leadership plays a crucial role in shaping the quality of the school climate, teachers' work culture, and the successful implementation of curricula oriented toward the holistic development of students (H. Chen & Liu, 2025). Furthermore, principals' leadership management encompasses the functions of planning, organizing, implementing, and supervising educational programs. Principals are required to possess managerial, supervisory, and entrepreneurial competencies in order to optimize the potential of teachers, educational staff, and school facilities (Murphy & Devine, 2023). Participatory and democratic leadership is particularly important in

primary schools, as it encourages collaboration, enhances teachers' work motivation, and creates a supportive learning environment that is conducive to the developmental needs of young learners.

The effectiveness of principals' leadership management in primary schools has direct implications for educational quality and student learning outcomes (Tandi et al., 2025). Principals who are visionary, communicative, and adaptive to change are better equipped to address the challenges of twenty-first-century education, including the integration of educational technology and the strengthening of students' character development (Astoro et al., 2023) (Pennefather, 2022). Therefore, the continuous development of principals' leadership competencies through systematic training, ongoing supervision, and sustained professional reflection is essential to ensure that primary schools are able to function effectively as a strong and stable foundation for the development of high-quality human resources. Through well-designed leadership development programs, principals can enhance their managerial, instructional, and transformational capacities, which in turn contribute to the creation of supportive learning environments, improved teacher performance, and more effective school governance. In the long term, strengthening principals' leadership competencies plays a crucial role in fostering sustainable educational quality and preparing future generations with the skills, values, and competencies needed to meet the demands of an increasingly complex global context.

Previous studies indicate that principals' leadership management plays a strategic role in improving teacher performance and instructional quality in primary schools. Effective principal leadership is able to create a supportive school climate and promote sustainable teacher professionalism (Alwa'id, 2021). Principals who apply participatory and democratic leadership practices can enhance the work commitment of teachers and educational staff (Springer et al., 2025). (Hendon & Bledsoe, 2022) also found that the success of educational leadership is largely determined by principals' ability to manage human resources and systematically direct instructional processes. In addition, (Osman & Vaidya, 2024) reported that values-based leadership grounded in school culture contributes positively to the improvement of school organizational quality.

Other studies emphasize the relationship between principals' leadership management and overall school quality improvement. (Meny et al., 2021) explain that the application of management functions, including planning, organizing, implementing, and controlling, is a crucial factor in achieving educational organizational goals. Through empirical research, (Hunker & Robb, 2021) revealed that principals' instructional leadership has a direct impact on the quality of teaching and learning processes as well as student learning outcomes in primary schools. Meanwhile, Leithwood, (Gordon, 2023) concluded that principals' leadership is a key factor, second only to the quality of classroom instruction, in determining school effectiveness. Therefore, strengthening principals' managerial and leadership competencies is a strategic necessity in the development of primary education.



Based on the figure presented, the Research Gap Pyramid illustrates a narrowing progression of research gaps from broad issues to more specific focal areas. At the base of the pyramid, it highlights the lack of in-depth understanding of principals' leadership practices, particularly in relation to management processes such as planning, implementation, and evaluation. In addition, previous studies have tended to pay insufficient attention to the developmental needs of primary school students, resulting in leadership approaches that are not fully aligned with the characteristics and learning needs of young learners (Canbulat, 2025). Toward the middle and the apex of the pyramid, the research gaps become increasingly specific, emphasizing the limited number of studies that connect principals' leadership management with educational policy contexts and the role of principals as agents of change. Existing research rarely examines how principals strategically integrate educational policies into their daily leadership practices or how they foster sustainable school cultures (Roy & Behera, 2021). Therefore, the research gap pyramid underscores the need for more in-depth and contextually grounded studies that comprehensively examine principals' leadership management in primary schools, encompassing managerial processes, policy integration, and the transformational role of principals in improving educational quality.

Principals' leadership management in primary school education continues to face various challenges that affect the effectiveness of educational delivery. One of the main issues is the suboptimal implementation of management functions, particularly in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of school programs oriented toward improving instructional quality (Takeuchi & Ruegg, 2022). A significant gap also exists between the expected role of principals as instructional leaders and leadership practices that remain largely administrative in nature (Khan et al., 2025). This condition is further exacerbated by challenges arising from changes in educational policies, rapid technological developments, and the diverse characteristics of primary school students, which require leadership approaches that are adaptive and contextually responsive.

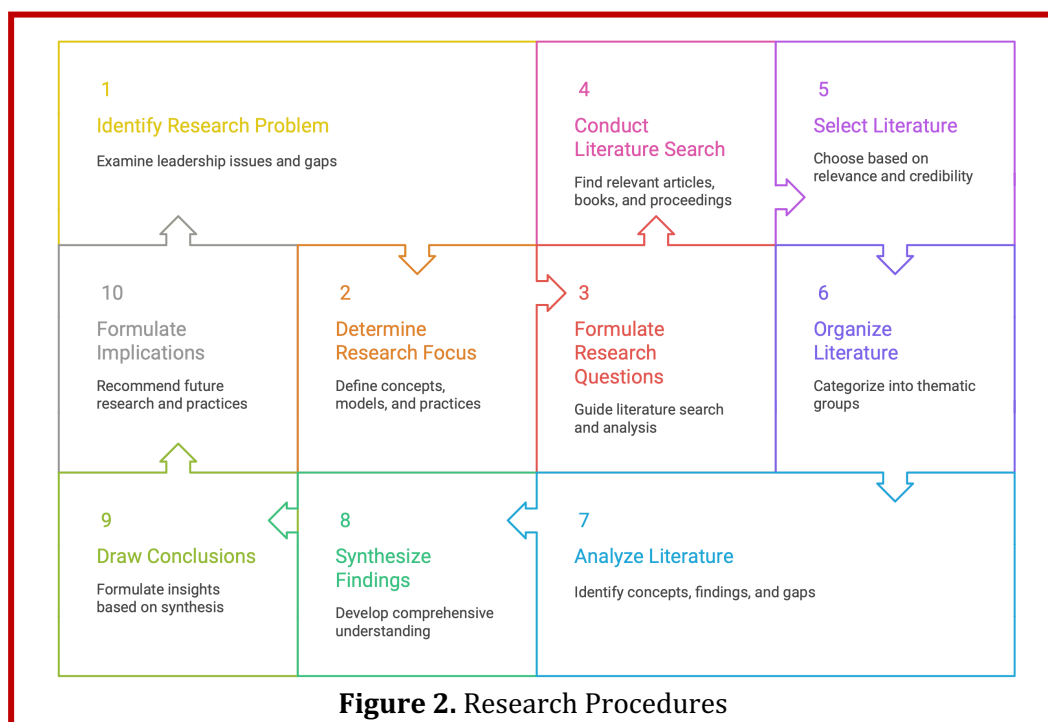
The impacts of these problems and gaps have direct implications for the quality of educational processes and outcomes in primary schools. Ineffective principal leadership can lead to low teacher performance, weak collaborative cultures, and a

school climate that is less conducive to students' academic and character development. Moreover, challenges that are not addressed strategically may hinder instructional innovation and the achievement of primary education goals (Ehmke & Dohm, 2025). Therefore, strengthening principals' leadership management has become an urgent necessity to enable primary schools to respond to educational challenges in a sustainable manner and to generate positive impacts on educational quality and students' optimal development. As a solution, principals' leadership management in primary schools needs to be reinforced through the development of instructional leadership that is integrated with school management functions, including needs-based planning, collaborative program implementation, and continuous evaluation oriented toward instructional improvement (Nhamburo & Mawere, 2025). Principals are expected to act as agents of change who can foster a reflective school culture, promote teacher professionalism, and contextually integrate educational policies and the use of technology in accordance with the characteristics of primary school students. An adaptive and participatory leadership approach is expected to bridge the gap between policy demands and leadership practices in the field, thereby contributing to the sustainable improvement of educational quality.

The research questions of this study are as follows. First, how is principals' leadership management implemented in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of educational programs in primary schools. Second, how do principals perform their roles as instructional leaders and agents of change in building school culture and enhancing teacher professionalism. Third, what challenges do principals face in implementing effective leadership management, and how do these challenges affect instructional quality in primary schools. This study is important because principals' leadership management is a key factor in determining the success of primary education as the foundation of the national education system. In addition to its novelty in examining principal leadership from a process-oriented and contextual perspective, this study is expected to contribute theoretically to the development of educational leadership studies and practically to principals and other stakeholders in improving school management and instructional quality in primary schools.

2. Research methods

This study employed a qualitative research design using a literature review approach aimed at developing a comprehensive understanding of principals' leadership management (Sari, 2022). The research procedure began with the identification of the research problem through an examination of leadership issues and existing research gaps. This stage was followed by the determination of the research focus and the formulation of research questions to guide the literature search (Erdem, 2022). The subsequent stage involved the systematic search and selection of relevant and credible literature, including journal articles, academic books, and conference proceedings, which were then organized and categorized into thematic areas of analysis (Coronel, 2024). The selected literature was analyzed to identify key concepts, research findings, and existing gaps, and subsequently synthesized to construct a comprehensive understanding of the topic. The research procedure concluded with the drawing of conclusions and the formulation of implications and recommendations for future research and for the development of leadership practices in primary school education.



Data collection in this study was conducted through a systematic literature review by examining various scholarly sources relevant to principals' leadership management. The data were obtained from national and international journal articles, academic books, and conference proceedings that address educational leadership and primary school management. The data collection process began with the identification of the research focus and research questions, which served as guidelines for conducting literature searches using credible academic databases (T. Zhang, 2022). The retrieved literature was then screened based on topic relevance, methodological clarity, and source credibility to ensure the quality of the data analyzed. After the selection process, the data were collected by organizing and categorizing the selected sources into thematic areas corresponding to key aspects of principals' leadership management (Ntimuk et al., 2023). Each source was analyzed to identify relevant concepts, models, practices, and research findings, which were systematically recorded as research data. The results of the data collection process were subsequently used as the basis for literature analysis and synthesis in order to develop a comprehensive understanding, draw conclusions, and formulate implications and recommendations for the development of principals' leadership management in primary school education.

Data analysis in this study was conducted through thematic analysis of the literature that had been collected and selected. Each source was examined in depth to identify key concepts, leadership models, management practices, and research findings relevant to principals' leadership management. The analysis process began with a thorough reading and understanding of each source, followed by the identification and coding of important information related to the research focus. The extracted data were then classified into thematic categories aligned with stages of leadership management, including planning, implementation, evaluation, instructional leadership, and the role of principals as agents of change. The next stage involved data synthesis, which entailed integrating findings from multiple sources to develop a comprehensive and systematic understanding of the topic. At this stage, similarities and differences among findings were compared, patterns and relationships were identified, and existing research gaps

were formulated. The results of the synthesis served as the basis for drawing conclusions and formulating theoretical and practical implications related to principals' leadership management in primary school education. Through this systematic and structured data analysis, the study aims to provide a holistic perspective and make a meaningful academic contribution to the development of educational leadership research.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Results

The results of this study are presented to provide a comprehensive overview of how principals perform managerial functions and instructional leadership, the strategic roles they assume in improving instructional quality, and the various challenges encountered in leadership practices within primary schools. The presentation of these findings is expected to illustrate the actual conditions of principals' leadership as reported in previous studies, while also serving as a basis for understanding their implications for instructional quality and the development of primary school education.

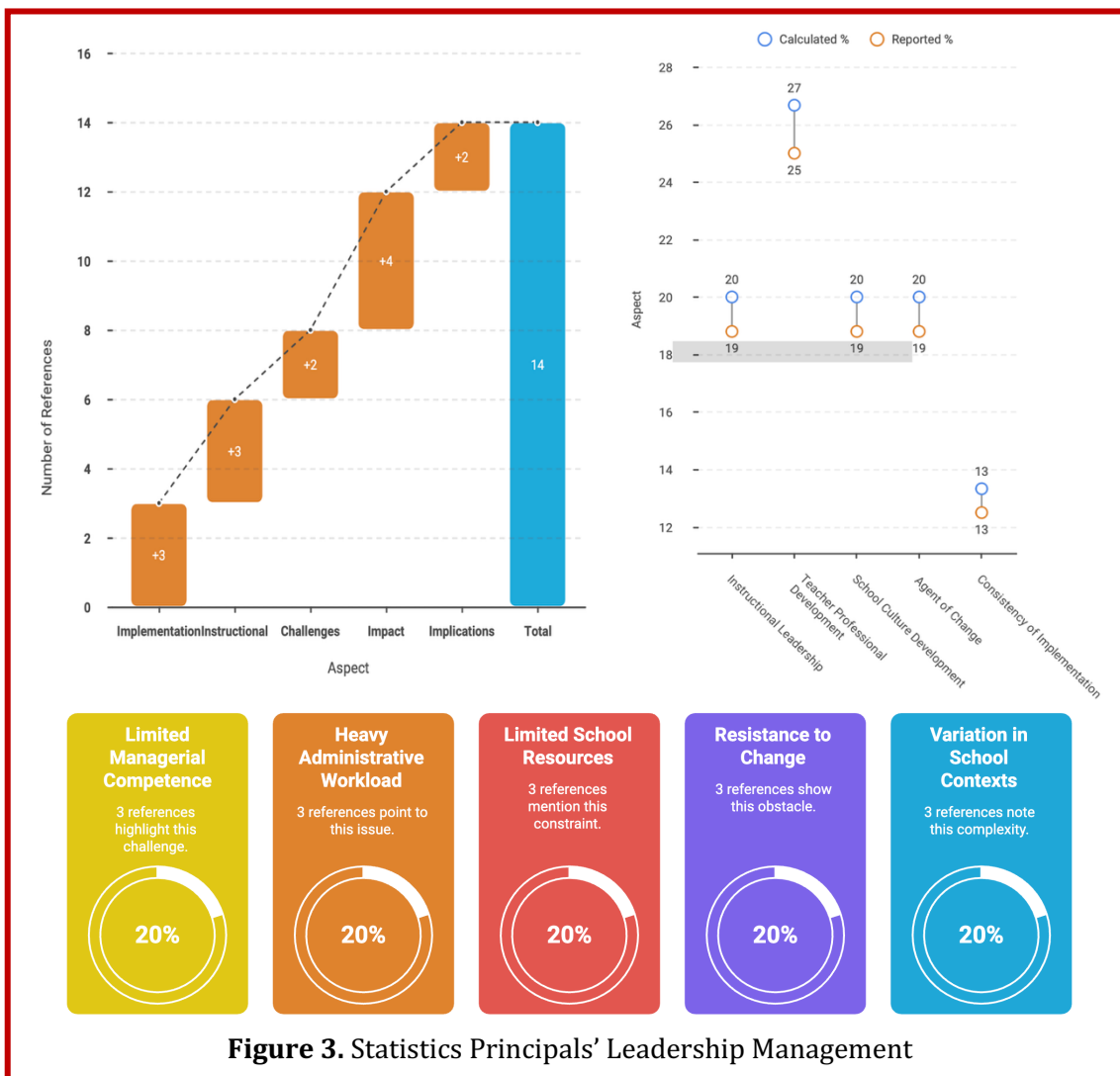


Figure 3. Statistics Principals' Leadership Management

Figure 3 illustrates the statistical distribution of research findings on principals' leadership management based on 44 reviewed references. The first section shows that Leadership Management Implementation accounts for 14 references (31.8%), with the largest proportion focusing on the Impact on Instructional Quality (4 references), followed by implementation and instructional leadership roles (3 references each), while leadership challenges and implications receive comparatively less attention (2 references each). The second section highlights that within instructional leadership, Teacher Professional Development emerges as the dominant theme (25%), whereas Consistency of Implementation represents the lowest proportion (12.5%), indicating uneven enactment across schools. The third section demonstrates that leadership challenges are evenly distributed, with Limited Managerial Competence, Heavy Administrative Workload, Limited School Resources, Resistance to Change, and Variation in School Contexts each contributing 20% (3 references each), suggesting that leadership issues are multidimensional and equally significant. Overall, the figure confirms that although leadership functions have been implemented, the integration of managerial and instructional leadership remains inconsistent and constrained by structural and contextual challenges.

The distribution of themes shows that research attention is relatively balanced between leadership implementation, instructional leadership roles, and leadership challenges, reflecting a shift from purely administrative perspectives toward a more integrated understanding of leadership and instructional quality. However, the stronger emphasis on teacher professional development compared to the consistency of implementation suggests that leadership practices are not yet applied uniformly across schools. Overall, these patterns imply that efforts to improve instructional quality require not only strengthening principals' instructional leadership competencies but also addressing systemic conditions that hinder sustainable and integrated leadership practices in primary schools.

Implementation of Principals' Leadership Management

The findings indicate that principals in primary schools have implemented leadership management through the functions of planning, implementation, and evaluation of educational programs. Planning is carried out through the formulation of the school's vision, mission, and programs based on school needs and prevailing educational policies. Program implementation involves coordination with teachers and educational staff, while evaluation is conducted through supervision and monitoring activities. However, the implementation of leadership management tends to remain administrative in nature and has not yet been fully oriented toward sustainable improvement in instructional quality.

Table 1. Research Findings Based on a Literature Review

Aspect of Analysis	Main Findings	Explanation of Findings	Journal References
Implementation of Principals' Leadership Management	Management functions have been implemented but remain suboptimal	Principals carry out planning, implementation, and evaluation of educational programs through the formulation of the school's vision, mission, and work plans. However, implementation remains largely	(Lund, 2022) (Nurlaeli et al., 2024)

		administrative and has not been fully directed toward sustainable improvement in instructional quality.	
Principals' Role as Instructional Leaders	Influences instructional quality and teacher professionalism	Principals play a role in teacher development, academic supervision, building collaborative school cultures, and encouraging instructional innovation. The role of principals as instructional leaders and agents of change has been implemented, although not consistently across primary school contexts.	(Nurdianah et al., 2024) (Murphy & Brennan, 2022) (Nkosi, 2025)
Leadership Challenges Faced by Principals	Managerial and structural constraints remain dominant	Challenges include limited managerial competence, heavy administrative workloads, resistance to change, and limited school resources, all of which hinder the optimization of instructional leadership.	(Lopez, 2024) (Beyessa & Kenea, 2023)
Impact on Instructional Quality	Instructional quality has not improved evenly	Ineffective leadership contributes to variations in instructional quality and teacher performance. Improvement in instructional quality depends largely on principals' ability to integrate school management with instructional leadership.	(Q. Zhang, 2023) (Furqon & Nurdin, 2025) (Tang, 2023) (Moyi, 2021)
Implications for School Leadership	The need to strengthen instructional leadership	The literature emphasizes the importance of continuous development of principals' competencies to enable the integrated enactment of managerial and instructional leadership roles.	(McHugh, 2023) (Abdelkader et al., 2023)

Based on the analyzed literature, Table 1 presents an overview of principals' leadership management in primary school education. Overall, the findings affirm that principals' leadership plays a strategic role in managing educational programs, guiding instructional processes, and improving school quality. The literature review further indicates that principals' leadership practices are inseparable from core management functions, including planning, implementation, and evaluation of educational programs. The findings indicate that the implementation of principals' leadership management has generally been carried out in primary schools, particularly in the formulation of the school's vision, mission, and educational programs. Principals serve as the main decision makers in determining the direction of school policies in accordance with internal school needs and prevailing educational policies. However, the literature review also reveals that the implementation of leadership management remains

predominantly administrative in nature, resulting in a limited orientation toward sustainable improvement in instructional quality. In addition to managerial implementation, the findings highlight the role of principals as instructional leaders. The literature shows that principals are responsible for fostering teacher development, conducting academic supervision, and creating a school culture that supports the enhancement of instructional quality. This role is manifested through strengthened teacher collaboration, continuous professional development, and support for instructional innovation in primary schools.

The findings further emphasize that principals also function as agents of change in responding to the dynamic and evolving demands of education. Principals are expected to adapt educational policies, utilize technology, and promote positive changes in instructional practices. Nevertheless, the literature indicates that this role as an agent of change has not been implemented consistently, largely due to limitations in leadership competence and systemic support. The review also identifies several challenges faced by principals in implementing effective leadership management, including heavy administrative workloads, limited school resources, and resistance to change among school stakeholders. These conditions restrict principals' capacity to focus on instructional leadership and the sustainable development of educational quality.

The impact of these challenges is reflected in the uneven improvement of instructional quality in primary schools. The literature demonstrates variations in instructional quality and teacher performance across schools, which are influenced in part by differences in the effectiveness of principals' leadership. This finding underscores that instructional quality is strongly affected by principals' ability to integrate managerial functions with instructional leadership. Based on the research findings, it can be concluded that principals' leadership management requires strengthening, particularly by shifting the focus from mere administrative compliance toward the enhancement of instructional quality. Such strengthening includes improving principals' managerial and instructional leadership competencies, as well as providing policy support that enables principals to perform their roles effectively and optimally.

Principals' Role as Instructional Leaders

This study found that principals play a pivotal role as instructional leaders in enhancing the quality of teaching and learning while strengthening teacher professionalism. Their leadership extends beyond administrative responsibilities to actively shaping instructional direction, guiding pedagogical practices, and ensuring that classroom activities align with curricular goals and student learning needs. Through continuous academic supervision, mentoring, and structured professional development initiatives, principals contribute to the improvement of teachers' pedagogical competence and reflective practice. These efforts help create a more focused and academically oriented school environment. Furthermore, principals cultivate a supportive and collaborative school culture by encouraging teamwork, open communication, and shared commitment to instructional improvement. As agents of change, they promote instructional innovation and adapt school practices to evolving policy demands and educational developments. However, the enactment of this instructional leadership role remains uneven across primary school contexts. Differences in leadership competence, institutional support, and school conditions

influence how consistently and effectively principals are able to implement instructional leadership practices.

Table 2. Principals' Role as Instructional Leaders

Aspect of the Principals' Role	Main Findings	Explanation of Literature Review Findings	Journal References
Instructional Leadership	Improves the quality of teaching and learning processes	Principals play a key role in setting instructional directions, monitoring classroom teaching practices, and ensuring that instruction is oriented toward improving student learning outcomes. Strong instructional leadership contributes directly to the quality of teaching and learning processes.	(Watts, 2022) (Joseph Seyi et al., 2024) (Bellemans & Devos, 2021)
Teacher Professional Development	Continuous academic supervision and mentoring	Principals conduct academic supervision, teacher coaching, and professional mentoring as efforts to enhance pedagogical and professional competencies. These practices support improvements in teacher performance and instructional quality in primary schools.	(Jansen & Plessis, 2020) (Kılınç & Gümüş, 2020) (X. Chen & Chen, 2024) (Xie & Chansirisira, 2025)
Development of School Culture	Collaborative and supportive school culture	Principals foster a positive school culture by strengthening teacher collaboration, promoting open communication, and building shared commitment to instructional improvement. A supportive school culture serves as a foundation for effective instructional leadership.	(Drysdale et al., 2021) (Šimkute-Bukante & Žydžiunaite, 2025) (Gomiole et al., 2024)
Role as Agents of Change	Encouragement of instructional innovation	Principals act as agents of change by promoting instructional innovation, adapting educational practices to policy changes, and integrating technology into teaching and learning processes in primary schools.	(Park & Datnow, 2022) (ÇAYAK, 2023) (Zerrad & Schechter, 2025)
Consistency of Implementation	Uneven implementation across schools	The literature indicates that the enactment of principals' instructional leadership roles varies across schools, influenced by principals' competencies, policy support, and school conditions.	(Bantwini & Moorosi, 2023) (McLure & Aldridge, 2023)

The findings indicate that principals play an active role in setting instructional directions and academic standards within schools. Through academic policies and the supervision of classroom teaching practices, principals ensure that teaching and learning activities align with curricular goals and students' learning needs. This role underscores that principals' leadership extends beyond managerial responsibilities to include a strong focus on enhancing instructional quality. Furthermore, the literature review reveals that teacher professional development constitutes a critical component of principals' instructional leadership. Principals engage in continuous academic supervision and mentoring to improve teachers' pedagogical and professional competencies. Such supervision functions not merely as an evaluative mechanism but also as a process of guidance and reflection aimed at improving instructional practices in primary schools.

The findings also indicate that principals play a significant role in building a supportive and collaborative school culture. By strengthening collaboration among teachers, fostering open communication, and establishing shared values and norms, principals create a school environment that supports the improvement of instructional quality. A positive school culture serves as an essential foundation for the effectiveness of instructional leadership. Furthermore, the literature review highlights the role of principals as agents of change in responding to the dynamic and evolving demands of education. Principals promote instructional innovation, encourage the integration of technology, and adapt educational practices to policy changes and contemporary needs. This role demonstrates that instructional leadership is not static, but rather adaptive to ongoing change.

The findings reveal that the enactment of principals' roles as instructional leaders has not yet been fully consistent across schools. Variations in implementation are influenced by differences in principals' competencies, policy support, and school conditions and resources. As a result, the quality of instructional leadership and its impact on instructional quality remain uneven. The influence of principals' instructional leadership is reflected in the quality of teaching and learning processes and teacher professionalism. Schools led by principals with strong instructional leadership tend to exhibit a more positive academic climate, more intensive teacher collaboration, and more innovative instructional practices. Conversely, limitations in the implementation of this role may hinder efforts to improve instructional quality.

Leadership Challenges and Their Impact on Instructional Quality

The findings indicate that principals encounter multiple challenges in implementing effective leadership management within primary schools. Among the most prominent obstacles are limitations in managerial competence, the burden of extensive administrative responsibilities, and restricted access to adequate school resources. These constraints reduce principals' capacity to plan strategically, supervise instruction intensively, and support continuous teacher development. When much of their time and energy are directed toward administrative compliance, opportunities to exercise strong instructional leadership become limited. These challenges directly influence the consistency and quality of instructional practices across schools. Limited leadership capacity and resource constraints hinder the implementation of instructional innovation and sustained professional growth among teachers. Consequently, improvements in instructional quality are uneven, as reflected in differences in teacher performance and the effectiveness of students' learning

experiences. This situation underscores the need for systemic support and leadership development to enable principals to balance managerial demands with their critical role in advancing instructional quality.

Table 3. Leadership Challenges and Their Impact on Instructional Quality

Aspect of Leadership Challenges	Main Findings	Impact on Instructional Quality	Journal References
Limited Managerial Competence	Leadership competence remains uneven	Limited managerial capacity among principals results in suboptimal planning and management of instruction, leading to slow progress in improving instructional quality.	(Llorent-Bedmar et al., 2021) (Ralebese et al., 2025) (F. Chen et al., 2025)
Heavy Administrative Workload	Leadership focus is diverted	High administrative demands reduce the time and attention principals can devote to instructional leadership, resulting in less effective academic supervision and teacher development.	(Triyantoro et al., 2024) (Forfang, 2020) (Haglund & Glaés-Coutts, 2022)
Limited School Resources	Insufficient support for instruction	Constraints in facilities, infrastructure, and funding hinder instructional innovation and teacher professional development, negatively affecting the quality of teaching and learning processes.	(Altun, 2025) (Bush, 2022) (Ho & Kang, 2022)
Resistance to Change	Instructional innovation is constrained	Resistance among some teachers and educational staff slows and weakens the implementation of instructional innovations.	(Anderson & Weiner, 2023) (Tamadoni et al., 2021) (Fauzi et al., 2024)
Variation in School Contexts	Uneven instructional quality	Differences in school conditions and policy support lead to disparities in the implementation of instructional leadership and improvements in instructional quality across primary schools.	(Börü, 2020) (Da'as et al., 2025) (Zeng et al., 2024)

Based on the literature reviewed and summarized in Table 3, leadership challenges faced by principals emerge as a significant finding of this study. The review indicates that principals in primary schools encounter various obstacles in implementing effective leadership management, stemming from both internal and external school factors. These challenges directly or indirectly influence the quality of instructional leadership and, consequently, the overall instructional quality in primary school education.

The findings indicate that limited managerial competence constitutes one of the main challenges faced by school principals. Not all principals possess sufficient readiness and capacity to manage school resources strategically. This condition results in planning and implementation of instructional programs that are not fully oriented

toward improving instructional quality, thereby constraining the overall development of educational quality. In addition, heavy administrative workloads represent a significant challenge in the exercise of principal leadership. Principals are often preoccupied with administrative tasks and reporting requirements, which limits the time and energy available to fulfill their roles as instructional leaders. Consequently, academic supervision, teacher development, and instructional mentoring cannot be carried out intensively and sustainably.

The literature review also reveals that limitations in school resources, including facilities, infrastructure, and funding, hinder the effectiveness of principals' leadership. These constraints restrict principals' capacity to promote instructional innovation and support teachers' professional development. As a result, the quality of instructional processes is difficult to improve optimally across diverse primary school contexts. Another challenge identified is resistance to change within the school environment. Some teachers and educational staff demonstrate limited openness to instructional innovation and reform. This condition makes it difficult for principals to implement new policies and to promote changes toward more innovative and adaptive instructional practices that better address students' learning needs.

The findings also indicate that variations in school contexts and conditions lead to differences in the implementation of leadership practices and improvements in instructional quality. Differences in policy support, socioeconomic conditions, and school characteristics affect principals' capacity to manage the challenges they face. As a result, instructional quality in primary schools has not improved evenly across schools. The cumulative impact of these leadership challenges is reflected in the quality of instructional processes and teacher performance. The literature review indicates that schools facing greater leadership challenges tend to experience difficulties in achieving sustained improvements in instructional quality, which in turn affects instructional effectiveness and student learning outcomes.

The findings of this study confirm that leadership challenges faced by principals have a significant impact on instructional quality in primary schools. These findings underscore the need to strengthen principals' leadership competencies, reduce administrative workloads, and provide adequate policy and resource support to enable principals to perform their instructional leadership roles effectively and sustainably.

Country Distribution

The analysis of country distribution provides an important overview of the geographical landscape of research contributing to the themes examined in this study. Mapping the countries represented in the selected literature allows for a clearer understanding of where scholarly attention is concentrated and how research productivity varies across different national contexts. Such an analysis is particularly relevant in leadership and educational research, where contextual, cultural, and policy differences often shape the focus and outcomes of studies. To enhance the interpretability of this distribution, a network-based visualization approach is employed. This type of visualization, commonly used in bibliometric analyses such as those generated by VOSviewer or NVivo, enables the representation of countries as nodes, with node size indicating the frequency of publications. The visual structure facilitates the identification of dominant contributors as well as peripheral countries, offering a holistic view of the global research landscape.

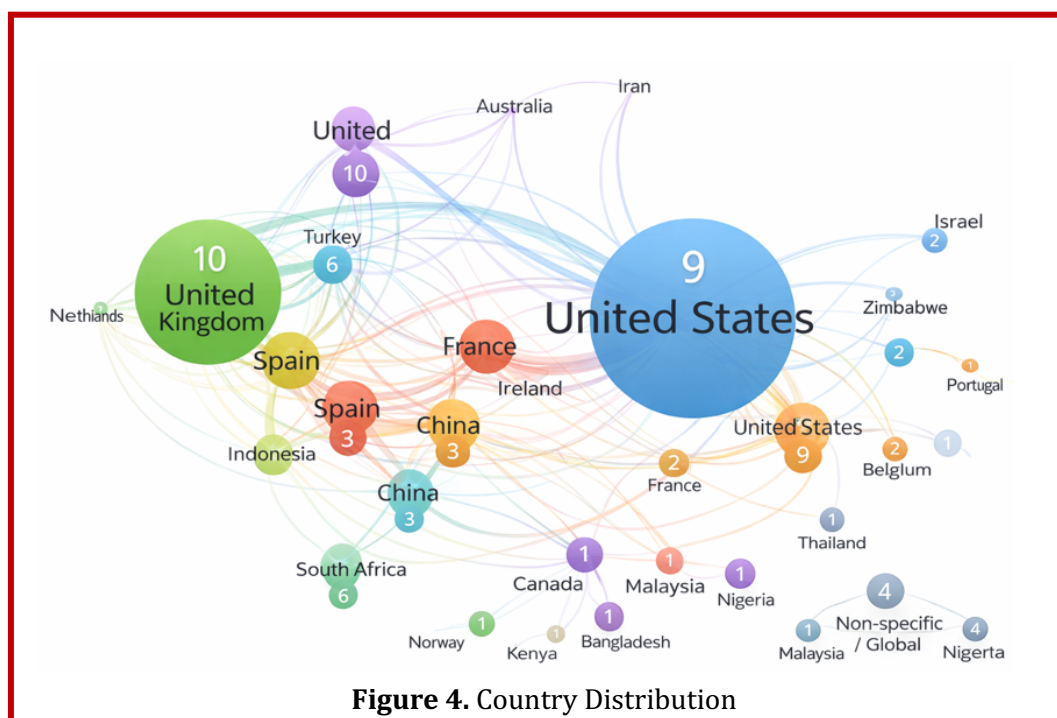


Figure 4. Country Distribution

As illustrated in Figure X, the United States and the United Kingdom emerge as the most prominent contributors, as indicated by the largest node sizes. This dominance reflects the strong research infrastructure, established academic traditions, and sustained interest in educational leadership and supervision within these countries. Their central positions in the visualization further suggest their influential role in shaping international research agendas and theoretical frameworks. A second tier of contributing countries, including Turkey, South Africa, Ireland, and Indonesia, demonstrates moderate yet significant participation in the literature. These countries occupy positions surrounding the central nodes, indicating active engagement with leadership and supervision research, often within specific educational reform or contextual challenges. Their presence highlights the growing diversification of research perspectives beyond traditionally dominant Western contexts.

Countries with lower publication frequencies appear at the periphery of the visualization, forming a long-tail distribution pattern. This group includes nations such as Kenya, Bangladesh, Nigeria, and Portugal, whose contributions, while limited in number, provide valuable context-specific insights. The peripheral positioning does not imply lesser importance; rather, it reflects structural differences in research capacity, funding availability, and publication access. Overall, the visualization reveals an uneven but increasingly globalized research landscape. While scholarly output remains concentrated in a small number of countries, the inclusion of diverse national contexts enriches the field by introducing varied educational realities and leadership practices. This pattern underscores the need for greater cross-national collaboration and the amplification of underrepresented regions to achieve a more balanced and inclusive body of knowledge in educational leadership research.

3.2 Discussion

The discussion of the research findings indicates that the implementation of principals' leadership management in primary schools has generally been carried out in accordance with core management functions, namely planning, implementation, and

evaluation. The formulation of the school's vision, mission, and programs reflects the principal's role as a policy direction setter and organizational manager within the educational context. However, the dominance of an administrative approach in leadership practices suggests that management functions have not yet been fully integrated with instructional leadership. This condition points to a gap between the expected role of principals as strategic instructional leaders and leadership practices that remain largely oriented toward regulatory compliance and administrative requirements. Furthermore, the discussion highlights that principals' roles as instructional leaders make a significant contribution to improving the quality of teaching and learning processes as well as teacher professionalism. Principals support teacher development through academic supervision, foster collaborative school cultures, and encourage continuous professional development. This role aligns with the concept of instructional leadership, which positions principals as key actors in enhancing instructional quality. Nevertheless, variations in the enactment of this role indicate that not all principals are able to implement instructional leadership consistently and systematically across diverse primary school contexts.

The discussion further indicates that leadership challenges constitute a major barrier to the optimization of principals' leadership management. Heavy administrative workloads, limited managerial competence, and constrained school resources reduce principals' capacity to focus on instructional development and educational innovation. The impact of these challenges is reflected in instructional quality that has not improved evenly, as evidenced by variations in teacher performance and the quality of students' learning processes. These findings underscore that the effectiveness of principal leadership is largely determined by the ability to integrate managerial functions with instructional leadership in a balanced and sustainable manner. The findings of this study are consistent with (Matos et al., 2024) assertion that principals' instructional leadership has a significant influence on instructional quality but is often constrained by administrative demands. In addition, (Templeton et al., 2021) emphasize that principal leadership is a key factor in school success, second only to the quality of classroom instruction, and that its effectiveness is strongly shaped by systemic support and principals' leadership capacity. Thus, the results of this study reinforce previous research findings and highlight the need to strengthen principals' leadership management with a stronger instructional focus in order to achieve sustainable improvements in the quality of primary school education.

The discussion of the research findings indicates that the principal's role as an instructional leader is a central factor in improving the quality of teaching and learning processes in primary schools. Principals function not only as school administrators but also as academic leaders who determine instructional direction through the establishment of learning standards, supervision of classroom instruction, and alignment of teaching and learning activities with curricular goals and students' learning needs. These findings affirm that instructional leadership requires principals' direct involvement in the core process of education, namely teaching and learning, thereby positioning instructional quality as a collective responsibility led by the principal. Furthermore, the findings demonstrate that the development of teacher professionalism is an integral component of principals' instructional leadership. Principals play an active role in providing continuous guidance and academic supervision to enhance teachers' pedagogical and professional competencies.

Supervision is understood not merely as an evaluative activity, but as a process of mentoring and shared reflection that encourages teachers to improve and develop their instructional practices. Accordingly, principals' instructional leadership contributes directly to improved teacher performance and the overall quality of teaching and learning processes in primary schools.

The discussion also indicates that principals play a crucial role in building a supportive and collaborative school culture. By strengthening collaboration among teachers, fostering open communication, and instilling shared values and commitments, principals create a school environment that supports high-quality learning. In addition, principals function as agents of change by promoting instructional innovation, encouraging the integration of technology, and adapting educational practices to policy developments and contemporary demands. However, variations in the consistency with which these roles are enacted suggest that not all principals are able to implement instructional leadership optimally, resulting in uneven improvements in instructional quality across schools. The findings of this study are consistent with (Pilot et al., 2023), who emphasized that principals' instructional leadership has a direct influence on the quality of teaching and learning processes as well as student learning outcomes. Similarly, (Lia & Gunadi, 2025) demonstrated that leadership focused on instruction has a greater impact on student performance than leadership oriented primarily toward administrative management. Thus, the results of this study reinforce previous research and underscore that strengthening principals' roles as instructional leaders in a consistent and sustainable manner is essential for improving the quality of primary school education.

The discussion of the research findings indicates that leadership challenges faced by principals constitute a crucial factor influencing the effectiveness of leadership management and instructional quality in primary schools. Limited managerial competence emerges as one of the main constraints that prevents principals from managing school resources strategically and orienting leadership practices toward instructional improvement. This condition affects the planning and management of instructional programs, resulting in less focused efforts to enhance educational quality and slowing progress toward optimal improvement. In addition to limited competence, heavy administrative workloads represent a significant challenge in the exercise of principal leadership. Complex administrative and reporting tasks consume principals' time and attention, thereby limiting their ability to perform their roles as instructional leaders effectively. As a result, academic supervision, teacher development, and instructional mentoring are often not conducted intensively or sustainably. This finding indicates that the dominance of administrative demands can shift leadership priorities away from instructional development toward compliance with bureaucratic requirements.

The discussion further underscores that limited school resources and resistance to change exacerbate the leadership challenges faced by principals. Constraints related to facilities, infrastructure, and funding hinder instructional innovation and teachers' professional development. At the same time, resistance among some members of the school community makes it difficult for principals to implement new policies and to promote innovative instructional practices. Variations in school contexts and conditions further widen disparities in instructional quality across primary schools, resulting in uneven improvements in learning quality. The findings of this study are

consistent with (Nielsen et al., 2022) (Ogunfowokan & Salau, 2023), who reported that administrative burdens and limited leadership capacity often impede principals' effectiveness as instructional leaders. In addition, (Mustofa et al., 2021) emphasized that the success of school leadership is strongly influenced by principals' leadership competence and the availability of adequate systemic support. Accordingly, the results of this study reinforce previous research and highlight that strengthening leadership competencies, reducing administrative workloads, and providing sufficient policy and resource support are essential prerequisites for achieving sustainable improvements in instructional quality in primary school education.

The country distribution analysis highlights a clear imbalance in the geographical contribution to research on educational leadership and supervision, with a strong concentration of studies originating from the United States and the United Kingdom. This pattern indicates that dominant theoretical frameworks and research agendas in the field are largely shaped by Western educational contexts, which may limit the generalizability of findings to other regions. Nevertheless, the growing representation of countries such as Turkey, South Africa, Ireland, and Indonesia suggests an emerging diversification of perspectives that reflects varied socio-cultural, institutional, and policy environments. Although contributions from developing and underrepresented countries remain limited in number, their inclusion provides context-sensitive insights that are essential for advancing a more inclusive and globally relevant understanding of school leadership practices.

4. Conclusion

Based on the findings of the literature review, it can be concluded that principals' leadership management in primary schools plays a highly strategic role in educational management and the improvement of instructional quality. Principals have implemented core management functions, including planning, implementation, and evaluation of educational programs, and have assumed roles as instructional leaders who promote improvements in teaching and learning processes as well as teacher professionalism. However, the implementation of leadership management remains largely administrative in nature, and the enactment of principals' roles as instructional leaders has not been consistently applied across schools. As a result, the impact on instructional quality has not been optimal or evenly distributed. Furthermore, the findings indicate that principals face various challenges in implementing effective leadership management, including limited managerial competence, heavy administrative workloads, constrained school resources, and resistance to change. These challenges hinder the effective enactment of instructional leadership and educational innovation in primary schools, ultimately affecting instructional quality and teacher performance. Therefore, strengthening principals' leadership competencies, reducing administrative burdens, and providing adequate policy and resource support are essential steps to enhance the effectiveness of school leadership and to achieve sustainable improvements in the quality of primary school education. In conclusion, the analysis reveals that research on educational leadership and supervision is largely dominated by studies from the United States and the United Kingdom, indicating an uneven global distribution of scholarly contributions. Although participation from other countries is gradually increasing, it remains limited. This pattern highlights the need for broader international representation to strengthen the contextual relevance and global applicability of educational leadership research.

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