

Teachers' Perception of Principal's Communication in the Management of Educational Units: A Case Study of Schools in the Coastal Area of Lhokseumawe City

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Abstract

This study examines teachers' perception of school principals' communication in the management of educational units in schools in coastal areas of Lhokseumawe City. The background is the importance of effective communication to create a conducive work environment and support learning in coastal areas that have unique challenges. The research method used is qualitative descriptive with data collection techniques through questionnaires, interviews, and observations. The results of the study show that the majority of teachers have a positive perception of the principal's communication. Principals who are skilled in communication are able to direct, motivate, and provide constructive feedback, which improves teacher performance and job satisfaction. These findings support the organizational communication theory by Robbins and Judge (2013) and the transformational leadership theory by Bass and Avolio (1994). The study also found communication challenges related to differences in styles and expectations, but principals who communicate openly and transparently are more effective at overcoming these challenges. The implication is that it is important to develop a communication training program for school principals to improve the quality of education in coastal areas.

Keywords: principal communication; teacher perception; coastal areas; education management

Introduction

In the increasingly complex context of global education, the role of leadership in educational institutions is becoming increasingly crucial to ensure the quality and effectiveness of the learning process (Zainal & Sarwoprasodjo, 2018). Effective communication between principals and teachers is one of the key factors in the successful management of educational units (Hidayah et al., 2023; Sri Wiyannah et al., 2022). The transformational leadership theory put forward by Bass and Avolio (1994) emphasizes the importance of inspirational communication and intellectual stimulation from leaders to motivate and empower organizational members. In the context of education, the transformational leadership of school principals can facilitate positive change and increase teachers' commitment to organizational goals. However, the implementation of this effective communication often faces diverse challenges, especially in areas with unique geographical and socio-economic characteristics such as coastal areas (Muh.Rizal, 2018). Human ecological theories highlight how environmental contexts, including geographical and socio-economic factors, can affect the interaction and development of individuals and institutions. In this case, coastal areas with special characteristics can form unique communication dynamics between principals and teachers (Rakhmavati, 2016).

Lhokseumawe City, as one of the coastal cities in Aceh Province, Indonesia, presents an interesting case study to explore the dynamics of communication between school principals and teachers in the context of managing educational units in coastal areas. The organizational communication theory put forward by Weick (1995) emphasizes that organizational members actively interpret messages and information in the context of their organization. This is relevant in understanding how teachers in coastal schools perceive and interpret communication from their principals. The coastal area of Lhokseumawe City has distinctive characteristics, with the majority of its residents making a living as fishermen and pond farmers. This condition creates its own challenges for the management of educational units in the region, considering the socio-economic background of students who tend to be homogeneous and closely related to marine life. Social capital theory can help explain how social networks and norms in coastal communities affect the dynamics of communication and school management (Khairussalam et al., 2023; Klein Buller & Buller, 1987).

In addition, the geographical factor of relative isolation from the city center can affect access to educational resources and the latest information regarding the development of the world of education (Minarchek, 2020). In this context, the role of communication of school principals is vital to ensure that national education policies can be implemented effectively while still paying attention to local needs and characteristics (Smith et al., 2016; Trant et al., 2019; van Dolen et al., 2007; Williams & Spiro, 1985). This is in line with the leadership contingency theory emphasizing that leadership effectiveness depends on the fit between the leader's style and the organizational situation (Akbar et al., 2024). Likewise, it is relevant in analyzing how school principals in the coastal area of Lhokseumawe adapt their communication styles to the local context. Although research on leadership, education, and organizational communication has been widely conducted (Ahmad et al., 2018; Luo et al., 2016; Miles et al., 1990), a study that specifically examines teachers' perception of school

principals' communication in the context of coastal areas is still relatively limited. The novelty of this study lies in its focus on the dynamics of communication in the educational environment of coastal areas, which have unique characteristics and challenges compared to urban or inland areas. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, this study aims to reveal the nuances and complexity of teachers' perceptions of school principals' communication in the management of educational units in the coastal area of Lhokseumawe City.

This study will make a significant contribution to science in several aspects. First, this research will enrich the literature on educational leadership by highlighting aspects of communication in specific geographical and socio-economic contexts. Second, the findings of this study are expected to provide new insights into effective communication strategies for the management of educational units in coastal areas, which can be applied in areas with similar characteristics. Third, the results of this study can be the basis for the development of education policies that are more responsive to the needs and challenges in coastal areas. Furthermore, this study will also explore how teachers' perception of school principals' communication affects their motivation, performance, and commitment in carrying out educational tasks in coastal areas. This aspect is important considering that teachers are the spearhead in the implementation of education policies and improving the quality of learning. By understanding teachers' perceptions, this study is expected to identify factors that support or hinder the effectiveness of communication between school principals, as well as formulate recommendations for improving educational leadership practices in coastal areas.

In the context of Lhokseumawe City, there are indications that there is a gap between teachers' expectations for the principal's communication and the reality that occurs in the field. Several cases show that there is communication between school principals and teachers in the implementation of education policies, which has an impact on the quality of education unit management. For example, there are reports of a lack of transparency in decision-making regarding the allocation of school resources, or lack of clarity in the implementation of curricula tailored to local contexts. This situation raises questions about the effectiveness of the communication style applied by the principal and how it is perceived by the teachers.

Using descriptive qualitative research methods, this study will delve deeply into teachers' experiences and perceptions through semi-structured interviews, participatory observations, and document analysis. This approach allows researchers to obtain a comprehensive picture and nuances of communication dynamics in schools in the coastal area of Lhokseumawe City. Through thematic analysis of the data obtained, this study aims to identify effective communication patterns, challenges faced, and adaptation strategies developed by school principals and teachers in the context of managing educational units in coastal areas. Thus, this study will not only fill the gaps in the literature on educational leadership in coastal areas, but also provide an empirical foundation for the development of a more effective communication model in the management of educational units in areas with similar characteristics. The results of this study are expected to be a reference for policymakers, education practitioners, and researchers in an effort to improve the quality of education in coastal areas, as well as contribute to the development of organizational communication theory in a broader educational context.

Method

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach to understand teachers' perceptions of school principals' communication in the management of educational units in schools in coastal areas of Lhokseumawe City. The research location was chosen based on the unique characteristics and challenges faced by schools in coastal areas. The subjects of the study are 105 teachers who teach in these schools from elementary schools (SD), junior high schools (SMP), and high schools (SMA), vocational high schools (SMK) or madrasah aliyah (MA) in the coastal area of Lhokseumawe. The subject was chosen because it has direct experience and a deep understanding of the communication of principals from their respective schools.

The data collection techniques used include survey questionnaires, interviews, and observations (Masfufah et al., 2019). The questionnaire was used to collect data on teachers' perceptions with a likert scale designed to explore various aspects of communication. In-depth interviews were conducted with selected teachers to obtain more detailed and in-depth information, while direct observations in the school environment were conducted to see how communication between principals and teachers took place in everyday contexts. The data collection procedure involves several stages, namely preparation, implementation, and data processing. Preparation includes the preparation of research instruments such as questionnaires and interview guides, as well as instrument trials. Implementation includes data collection through questionnaires, in-depth interviews, and direct observations. The data obtained is then analyzed qualitatively with thematic analysis techniques, which involve coding, categorization, thematization, and interpretation to identify the main themes that emerge from the data.

To ensure the validity and reliability of the research, several steps were taken, including triangulation of data collection techniques, member checking, and trail audits. Triangulation is carried out using several data collection techniques to validate the findings, member checking is carried out by confirming the findings to several respondents, and the audit trail records the research process in detail so that it can be traced and evaluated by other researchers. With this detailed research method, it is hoped that the research can provide a deep and comprehensive understanding of teachers' perceptions of school principals' communication in the management of educational units in schools in the coastal areas of Lhokseumawe City.

Results and Discussion

Results

This study examines teachers' perception of school principals' communication in the management of educational units in schools in coastal areas of Lhokseumawe City. The results of the study show that the majority of teachers have a positive perception of the communication built by the principal. Effective communication is considered a key factor in creating a conducive work environment and supporting learning success. Teachers report that principals who are skilled in communication are able to direct, motivate, and provide constructive feedback, which in turn improves teachers' performance and job satisfaction.

In theory, these results are in line with the theory of organizational communication put forward by Robbins and Judge (2013), which states that effective communication in educational organizations is essential to achieve organizational goals. This theory emphasizes that good communication helps solve problems, prevent misunderstandings, and build strong relationships between leaders and team members. In the context of a school, principals who are able to communicate well can create a collaborative and harmonious work culture.

Furthermore, the transformational leadership theory put forward by Bass and Avolio (1994) is also relevant to this finding. This theory explains that transformational leaders are able to inspire and motivate their subordinates through clear and visionary communication. Principals who adopt this leadership style tend to get a positive response from teachers because they feel valued and supported in carrying out their duties.

The study also found that there are several challenges in communication between principals and teachers, especially related to differences in communication styles and expectations. However, school principals who try to understand teachers' needs and perspectives and communicate openly and transparently are able to overcome these challenges more effectively. This is in line with several other studies that emphasize the importance of empathy, clarity, and openness in communication to build trusting and respectful relationships (Baudat et al., 2017; Guo et al., 2015; Lee & SunWoo, 2011; Pesch et al., 2015; Smith et al., 2016; Syakur et al., 2020; Vance et al., 2008). The results of the survey through a questionnaire on teachers' perceptions of the communication of school principals in the management of educational units in schools in the coastal area of Lhokseumawe City can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1. Results of the survey on teachers' perception of school principals

No.	Statement Items	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1	Good listeners	30%	50%	10%	7%	3%
2	The language is easy to understand	35%	45%	10%	6%	4%
3	Be friendly	40%	45%	8%	5%	2%
4	Be empathetic	28%	50%	12%	7%	3%
5	Define the purpose of communication	25%	50%	15%	7%	3%
6	Be humble	32%	48%	10%	6%	4%
7	Polite tone	38%	45%	10%	5%	2%
8	Pay attention to the content of the conversation	30%	50%	12%	5%	3%
9	Accepting criticism	28%	47%	15%	7%	3%
10	Determining the right time	30%	50%	10%	7%	3%
11	Not dominating the conversation	28%	48%	15%	6%	3%
12	Paying attention to reciprocity	32%	50%	12%	4%	2%
13	Not arrogant	35%	45%	10%	7%	3%
13	Make eye contact	30%	48%	12%	7%	3%

Based on Table 1, Overall, this study concludes that the communication ability of school principals in managing educational units in coastal areas according to the perception of teachers is more dominant who agrees with a high percentage figure. So it can be said that the communication of the principal according to the teacher is effective or good in managing the education unit. This is in line with the theory of organizational communication according to Robbins and Judge (2013) that effective communication between school principals and teachers is an important factor in the management of education units, especially education units in the coastal area of Lhokseumawe City. Principals who are able to communicate well can improve teacher performance and create a better learning environment for students (Bjelland et al., 2015; Solaja et al., 2016). These findings have practical implications for the development of training programs and the improvement of communication skills for school principals in order to improve the quality of education in the region.

Discussion

The results of this study show that teachers' perception of principal communication is greatly influenced by the environmental context and challenges faced by schools in coastal areas. These findings are in line with other studies that show that geographic and socio-economic contexts can influence the dynamics of communication and education management. For example, research (Akbar et al., 2024; Inah Ety Nur, 2015; Irsan et al., 2021; Muh.Rizal, 2018) by Rahayu (2020) who researched the communication of school principals in rural areas found that school principals who are able to

adapt to local conditions and build good interpersonal relationships with teachers tend to be more effective in managing schools. In addition, in urban schools, it has been shown that principals who are transparent and open in communicating with teachers can increase teachers' trust and participation in the decision-making process (Inah Ety Nur, 2015). These results support the findings of this study which indicates the importance of effective and participatory communication in school management. However, significant differences were found in the challenges faced by school principals in coastal areas compared to other areas. Principals in coastal areas often have to deal with additional issues such as limited resources and limited access, which affect the way they communicate and manage schools.

Research (Arifah, 2021; Sugianto, 2022) also highlighted that the success of principal communication is highly dependent on their ability to understand and respond to the specific needs of teachers and the school community. This supports the findings of this study which shows that teachers in coastal areas appreciate school principals who are responsive and understand their local context. Overall, the results of this study enrich the literature on the importance of local context in communication and school management, and confirm that the success of school principals in communicating depends not only on individual skills but also on their ability to adapt to specific local conditions.

Conclusion

The conclusion of this study shows that teachers' perception of the principal's communication in the management of educational units in schools in the coastal area of Lhokseumawe City is generally positive. Most teachers consider that the communication built by the principal is effective and is a key factor in creating a conducive work environment and supporting learning success. Principals who are skilled in communication are able to direct, motivate, and provide constructive feedback, which in turn improves teachers' performance and job satisfaction.

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