

# Strategic Planning in Schools: Theoretical Study and Strategic Implementation in School Context

Firmawati Anwar<sup>1\*</sup>, Nurhizrah Gistituati<sup>2</sup>, Hadiyanto Hadiyanto<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> MTsN Padang Panjang

<sup>2,3</sup> Universitas Negeri Padang

Email Corresponding Author: [firmawatianwar72@gmail.com](mailto:firmawatianwar72@gmail.com)

\*corresponding author

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## ABSTRACT

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### Abstract

*This study aims to examine the concept of strategic planning in the context of schools and analyze the supporting and inhibiting factors of its implementation. Using a qualitative approach with a literature study method, this study examines various library sources such as scientific journals, books, and policy reports related to strategic management of education. Data were analyzed descriptively-analytical with a thematic approach. The results of the study indicate that the understanding of strategic planning by school actors is still diverse, influenced by managerial literacy and leadership background. The main factors for successful strategy implementation are transformational leadership, school community involvement, and flexibility to policy changes. Conversely, obstacles arise from limited resources, resistance to change, and weak evaluation systems. Schools that successfully implement strategies effectively generally adopt an adaptive and community-based approach. This study suggests the need to strengthen strategic management training and develop contextual and flexible planning models. These findings are expected to be theoretical and practical contributions to improving the quality of school management in Indonesia.*

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## A. Introduction

Strategic planning has become an important part of modern education management, especially in schools' efforts to face increasingly complex external challenges. In the context of globalization, technological developments, and increasing demands from society for the quality of education, schools as public institutions are required to have a clear direction and planned strategy (Bryson, 2011). Strategic planning is not only a formal document, but also a systematic process that involves identifying the vision, mission, goals, and operational steps to achieve them.

The role of strategic planning in schools is also closely related to the effectiveness of institutional performance. Schools that have a strong strategic plan tend to be better able to manage resources, build synergy between stakeholders, and respond to environmental changes adaptively (Allison & Kaye, 2015). In practice, schools must involve the principal, teachers, students, school committees, and external parties in the preparation of strategic plans, so that the policies that are born

reflect shared aspirations. However, not all schools are able to implement strategic planning optimally. Many strategic plans only stop at the document level without becoming an implementation guide in daily decision making. This shows a gap between theory and practice, which in many cases is caused by a lack of understanding of the essence of strategic planning itself (Steiss, 2003). This problem is exacerbated by low managerial capacity at the school level and minimal ongoing monitoring and evaluation.

In the educational management literature, strategic planning in schools has been discussed in various approaches, ranging from technocratic to participatory approaches. Most studies emphasize the importance of the suitability between the school's vision and the local realities faced. Therefore, it is important to understand how theoretical concepts in strategic planning can be translated contextually in different school environments, including schools in urban, suburban, and rural areas. Contextual factors are determining factors in the success of implementing strategic planning in schools. Organizational culture, principal leadership, and teacher involvement are key elements in implementing the strategy that has been designed. Schools that have a collaborative culture are more successful in implementing long-term strategies than those that only rely on the authority of the leadership (Fullan, 2007). Therefore, strategy is not just about planning on paper, but also about transformational leadership.

Another challenge in implementing strategic planning is the dynamics of national education policies that often change. Changes in curriculum, accreditation systems, and financing policies often require schools to adjust previously formulated strategies. This regulatory instability requires schools to have high flexibility and adaptability (Mintzberg, 1994). Schools as learning institutions also need to realize that strategic planning is an ongoing process. It is not a document that is completed in one go, but must be continuously updated according to the development of the situation and the needs of students. Therefore, it is important to build an internal evaluation system that allows schools to revise strategies based on data and reflective analysis.

In the Indonesian context, strengthening the culture of strategic planning in schools is still a big homework. Many schools, especially in the regions, have not made strategic planning a managerial culture. In fact, regulations such as the School Medium-Term Work Plan (RKJM) have required medium-term planning as the basis for the operationalization of annual school activities (Kemendikbud, 2020). In other words, there is still a gap between regulations and real implementation in the field. Previous research by Putra (2018) showed that most elementary schools in the district area had not implemented strategic planning systematically, even though they had an RKJM document. This is due to the lack of strategic management training for school principals and the absence of technical assistance in the planning process. Similar findings were also conveyed by Lestari (2019) who studied secondary schools in urban areas. He found that although awareness of the importance of strategic planning is quite high, the implementation of the strategy is still sporadic and not integrated.

Furthermore, research by Santosa (2021) which focuses on private schools states that the success of strategy implementation is greatly influenced by the leadership style of the principal. Schools led by principals who have a strong vision and high managerial skills are able to integrate strategic plans into school programs in a concrete manner. However, on the other hand, there are also schools with good strategic plans on paper, but fail to be implemented due to weak control and supervision.

From these various studies, it appears that most studies emphasize the aspect of preparing strategic planning documents and factors inhibiting implementation, but not many have explored in depth the relationship between the internal context of schools and the success of strategy implementation. In particular, there is still a lack of studies that differentiate implementation strategies between public and private schools, as well as between regions with different socio-economic characteristics. This opens up space for further research that is more exploratory and contextual. In addition, most of the existing studies are still descriptive and have not developed a comprehensive conceptual model of strategic planning implementation in the school context. In fact, mapping operational models or frameworks would be very useful as a practical guide for schools in formulating and implementing their strategies. Therefore, a study is needed that is not only theoretical but also applicable in answering this problem.

The uniqueness of this study lies in its approach that combines theoretical studies with contextual exploration at the school level. This study not only seeks to identify how strategic planning is understood and implemented by school actors, but also analyzes the determinants of its success based on the educational strategic management framework. Thus, the results of this study are expected to contribute to the development of more adaptive and results-oriented managerial practices. In addition, this study seeks to formulate a strategy implementation model that can be applied in various types of schools based on institutional capacity and the social characteristics of the surrounding environment. The model is expected to be a dynamic reference that can be adjusted to the conditions of each school without losing its strategic essence. This approach offers novelty both conceptually and applicatively.

On the other hand, the reality in the field shows that many schools prepare strategic planning documents only to meet administrative demands. The document is rarely reviewed or used as a guideline in compiling annual work programs. As a result, there is a gap between plans and actions, which impacts the effectiveness and efficiency of school management. Furthermore, the disparity in quality between schools in developed and underdeveloped areas is also a reflection of the weakness of contextual strategic planning. Schools in underdeveloped areas often face limited human and financial resources that make it difficult for them to translate plans into real action. Therefore, the urgency to review how strategic planning is designed and implemented is very important in efforts to equalize the quality of national education.

## **B. Method**

This study uses a qualitative approach with a literature study method (library research). Literature study is a method that relies on library sources as the main data in answering the problem formulation. According to Zed (2004), literature study is a data collection technique through a study of various written sources that are relevant to the focus of the study. In this context, the data studied includes scientific books, journal articles, policy reports, school strategic planning documents, and dissertations or theses related to strategic planning in education.

The qualitative approach was chosen because it provides researchers with the freedom to deeply understand the phenomenon of strategic planning in schools in diverse contexts. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) explain that qualitative research aims to understand the meaning, structure, and patterns of a social phenomenon, not to measure quantitatively. In this study, data were analyzed descriptively-analytically in order to explore concepts, patterns, and challenges in implementing strategies in schools from various theoretical and practical perspectives.

Data collection was carried out through a systematic search process for relevant literature using keywords such as "strategic planning in schools", "educational leadership", "school improvement", and "educational strategic management". The search was conducted through databases such as Google Scholar, JSTOR, SAGE, ProQuest, and university repository portals in Indonesia. The references selected were publications from the last fifteen years, except for several conceptually relevant classical sources.

After being collected, the data were analyzed through the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions, as proposed by Miles and Huberman (1994). Data reduction was carried out by selecting important information that was in accordance with the focus of the research. Then, a classification of the main themes was carried out such as strategy formulation, school leadership, and strategy evaluation. The analysis was carried out repeatedly to ensure consistency of findings and explore the relationships between concepts.

The validity of the research results was increased through source triangulation. Creswell (2013) suggested that in literature studies, triangulation can be achieved by comparing various written sources to test data consistency. In addition, critical reflection was also used to evaluate the accuracy of interpretation. With this approach, the research is expected to produce a synthesis of in-depth and contextual knowledge regarding strategic planning practices in schools.

## C. Results and Discussion

### 1. Result

#### a. Perception and Understanding of Strategic Planning by School Actors

Initial findings indicate that understanding of strategic planning among school actors still varies greatly. Some principals and teachers understand strategic planning as merely an administrative obligation, not as a strategic management tool. This is in accordance with Lestari's findings (2019) which show that in many schools, documents such as RKJM and RKS are prepared only to meet accreditation requirements.

On the other hand, in some schools, especially those managed privately or community-based, there is a more substantive understanding. Principals position strategic planning as a long-term guide that functions to synergize all school programs. In Santosa's study (2021), it was found that schools with strong leadership tend to internalize strategic visions into staff learning and development programs. This difference in perception is influenced by the principal's educational background, leadership experience, and access to managerial training. Putra's research (2018) noted that principals who had attended training on strategic planning were better able to prepare applicable and measurable documents. In contrast, schools in remote areas often do not have the resources to develop a deep understanding of strategy.

In general, understanding of strategy has not been integrated into the institutional culture in many schools. There is still a separation between planning and implementation, because there is no system that connects annual evaluations with medium-term strategic plans. This shows that strategy has not been fully understood as a dynamic process, but only as a document product.

#### b. Supporting and Inhibiting Factors for Strategy Implementation

The implementation of strategic planning is largely determined by the leadership of the principal. Collaborative and visionary leadership encourages the involvement of all school members in implementing the strategy. Fullan (2007) emphasized that school transformation requires leadership that is able to drive a collective vision and build long-term commitment. Schools led with a participatory approach show significant progress in implementing their strategic plans.

On the other hand, resistance to change is a major obstacle. Many teachers feel that strategic plans will only add to the workload without any real impact on learning. This is exacerbated by low strategic literacy and lack of involvement in the planning process. Mintzberg (1994) highlighted that strategy will fail if it is not understood and owned by its main implementers.

Structural factors such as limited BOS funds, frequently changing government policies, and high administrative burdens are also obstacles. Schools have difficulty mapping priority scales because they have to continuously adjust to the demands of new policies. According to the Ministry of Education and Culture (2020), the misalignment between program planning and realization is often caused by limited school autonomy in budget management. In addition, the lack of a monitoring and evaluation system is a factor that makes the implementation of the strategy unfocused. Strategy evaluations that are formal in nature, without clear follow-up, mean that schools do not have feedback to improve implementation. Only a few schools conduct annual reviews of the RKJM documents as a basis for revising the annual work program.

#### c. Adaptive Strategies in Different School Contexts

Schools that are successful in implementing strategies generally have the flexibility to adapt plans according to local contexts. They are not fixated on the initial formulation of the strategy, but continue to adjust based on environmental conditions, input from school residents, and policy dynamics. In a study by Rahmawati (2020), private schools in urban areas adjusted strategies based on parent satisfaction surveys and student needs trends.

Schools in rural areas showed creativity in overcoming limitations. For example, some schools used a partnership approach with the community and local institutions to support strategy implementation. This reflects the community-based strategic planning model proposed by Glickman (2009), where strategies are built on community strengths. Inclusive schools also showed a unique form of strategy adaptation. They developed strategic plans that took into account the diversity of student needs and involved inclusive education specialists in the planning process. This strategy is flexible but based on student assessment data, as stated in Harsono's research (2021).

These findings indicate that there is no single strategy model that can be applied universally in all schools. Strategy implementation must be contextual and adaptive, while still referring to the basic principles of strategic planning. Therefore, national education policy needs to provide flexibility for schools to develop their own strategies.

## **2. Discussion**

### **a. Understanding Strategy as a Reflection of Managerial Literacy**

Variations in understanding strategic planning indicate that the managerial literacy of school actors is not evenly distributed. This is in line with the concept of strategic thinking which emphasizes the importance of systemic thinking skills in developing long-term visions (Liedtka, 1998). Schools that understand strategy substantively are able to use plan documents as a reference for action and an instrument for evaluating success.

The lack of awareness of some schools regarding the strategic value of planning reflects weak institutional capacity. According to Bush (2011), schools that do not build a reflective culture will tend to adopt formalistic planning. Planning only becomes an administrative obligation, not a participatory and sustainable decision-making process.

This gap in understanding shows the importance of strengthening managerial training for principals and teachers. Such training can improve understanding of how to develop, implement, and evaluate strategies effectively. Fullan (2007) emphasized that learning leadership can only develop if leaders understand their role as agents of strategic change.

### **b. Dynamics of Strategy Implementation: Between Leadership and Structural Barriers**

The implementation of strategic planning is greatly influenced by leadership style. Transformational leadership enables the building of shared commitment, open dialogue, and fair allocation of resources (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005). Schools that implement this leadership tend to succeed in uniting vision and concrete action in school programs.

However, the centralistic and fluctuating structure of education policy often hinders school flexibility. According to Mintzberg (1994), a good strategy is a strategy that is able to adapt to the environment. Unfortunately, education policy in Indonesia often changes without synchronization with the school's strategic plan, resulting in confusion and inconsistency between strategy and action.

In addition, budget constraints and high administrative burdens hamper the implementation of the strategy. Schools that do not have an internal evaluation system have difficulty in measuring the success of the strategy and making adjustments. This shows the importance of building a sustainable monitoring system as described by Bryson (2011) in Strategic Planning for Public and Nonprofit Organizations.

### **c. Contextual Adaptation as the Key to Strategy Success**

Flexibility in strategy implementation is the main characteristic of adaptive schools. This approach supports the view that strategy is not linear, but continues to develop along with external



and internal dynamics (Mintzberg, Ahlstrand, & Lampel, 2005). Schools that adapt strategies based on local needs demonstrate organizational resilience and the ability to innovate.

Inclusive schools and schools in remote areas develop strategies based on local resources. This confirms the concept of the resource-based view, which states that the internal strength of the organization is the main capital in formulating strategies (Barney, 1991). Thus, schools that understand their internal strengths are better able to formulate realistic and applicable strategies.

This strategy adaptation model can be used as a basis for developing a contextual framework in educational planning. An approach such as that proposed by Glickman (2009) in *Leadership for Learning* shows that strategies formulated together with the community have higher resilience to environmental changes. Therefore, a collaborative and adaptive approach needs to be the main principle in school management reform.

#### **D. Conclusion**

This study concludes that strategic planning in schools has not been fully understood and optimally implemented. Factors such as limited understanding, weak leadership, limited resources, and fluctuating education policies are the main obstacles in implementing the strategy. Successful schools demonstrate transformational leadership patterns, collaborative approaches, and strategies that are adaptive to the local context.

To improve the effectiveness of strategic planning in schools, ongoing managerial literacy training is needed for principals and teachers, as well as strengthening the internal evaluation system. A flexible and community-based planning model needs to be developed so that the strategy is not only a formal document, but also an operational guideline in improving the quality of education sustainably.

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