



Principals' Role of Visionary Leadership Based on Ethical Culture in Improving School Quality: A Systematic Literature Review

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Abstract: This research aims to investigate the role of school principals' visionary leadership based on an ethical culture in improving school quality. This research uses a systematic literature review method to examine several related articles. The research results show that visionary leadership by school principals plays a significant role and positively influences the quality of schools and institutions. The role of the school principal's visionary leadership style in improving the quality of education is demonstrated by several factors and characteristics of this style. The relationship between visionary leadership and ethical culture can drive innovation to improve the quality of education. The ethical culture in schools enables the formulation of the school's vision, mission, and goals by examining the school's characteristics and the community that participates in it. The final results of this research concluded that school principals who have vision, characteristics, competence, motivation, strong work standards, and a value orientation are leaders expected to improve the quality of education. This research is hoped to provide insight to other researchers, educators, school principals, and schools.

Keywords: ethical culture; principal; visionary leadership

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INTRODUCTION

Improving the overall quality of schools has become a central priority in modern educational development, as institutions aim to support Indonesia's national learning goals better. However, various obstacles continue to hinder efforts toward achieving optimal educational outcomes. One of the major constraints concerns the leadership capacity of school principals, who play a crucial role in shaping institutional progress. Moreover, limited teacher proficiency remains a significant factor influencing student achievement. Consequently, continuous professional development and the ability to respond to the complex, rapidly evolving demands of the current era are essential for educators. School principals hold essential responsibilities in advancing school quality as part of achieving broader educational objectives. Nevertheless, the Indonesian education system still faces basic yet critical issues, including a lack of a forward-looking educational philosophy and principals who focus primarily on administrative tasks rather than on transformative leadership roles (Ambika & Vayola, 2023). Visionary leadership from principals is therefore vital, as it supports enhancing school performance by aligning educational systems and strengthening the competencies needed to implement the curriculum more comprehensively and meaningfully.

The leadership of a school principal requires initiating deliberate, systematic changes through innovative, strategic approaches to enhance educational quality (Juharyanto, 2017). A comprehensive understanding of school management is essential, as it enables leaders to identify and address factors that improve learning outcomes. A principal's effectiveness is closely tied to the competencies they possess, which are crucial to advancing the school. A competent principal should have a well-grounded perspective on quality policies, ensure that the school's human resources pursue long-term goals, actively contribute to the development of school culture, serve as a model capable of translating concepts into practice, regularly review quality policies according to evolving needs, and allocate adequate resources to support educational improvement (Ubaidillah et al., 2019). In addition, Permendiknas Number 13 of 2007 emphasizes that school principals are expected to demonstrate strong competencies across multiple domains, including personal attributes, managerial abilities, entrepreneurial insight, supervisory expertise, and social skills.

Enhancing school quality through the visionary leadership of principals becomes more effective when rooted in the ethical culture they cultivate among all school stakeholders, including teachers and staff (Sunandar et al., 2013). Such ethical grounding enables principals to model moral behavior that shapes organizational norms, allowing daily practices within the school to generate cultural values that continue to evolve and form distinctive characteristics (Sunandar et al., 2023). Consequently, communities expect leaders who prioritize ethical culture to foster greater innovation while preserving the school's unique identity, thereby improving quality without compromising the institution's inherent character (Juharyanto et al., 2019). In addition to the

crucial role culture plays in enhancing school quality, ethical conduct in educational settings must be consistently upheld by principals, teachers, and staff. The implementation of ethics encompasses several key components: first, understanding ethical principles as part of professional development and instructional practice; second, recognizing the ethical responsibilities teachers bear when engaging with various curricular approaches; and third, developing strategies and reflective practices that promote ethical behavior in education. Work ethics function as a cultural domain in which prevailing norms guide interactions between cultural and social elements. Research findings indicate a strong correlation between ethical practices and teachers' values regarding school culture (Imron et al., 2023).

Gonzales (2022) found a strong association between visionary leadership and an institution's academic culture, particularly in communication dynamics within managerial leadership structures. Visionary leadership is therefore viewed as an effective approach, as higher educator performance and a more positive academic environment contribute directly to improved institutional outcomes (Gonzales, 2022). Similarly, Sahrawi demonstrates that school principals who adopt leadership practices grounded in ethical culture can significantly enhance school quality. By emphasizing ethical norms and consistent moral behavior, principals can influence individuals across the institution, fostering improvements while preserving the core values upheld by the school community in achieving its vision, mission, and objectives (Nurdiansyah et al., 2021).

School principals' leadership plays a crucial role in determining overall improvements in school quality (Suparyo et al., 2024). A principal's visionary leadership in advancing educational standards is reflected in strategic planning, systematic quality assurance, and the continuous enhancement of teacher performance, all of which contribute to achieving optimal institutional outcomes (Suparyo et al., 2024). Moreover, visionary leadership influences policy direction within schools, enabling leaders to drive meaningful change. Such progress requires not only the principal's commitment but also strong support and collaboration between schools and broader educational institutions (Sunandar & Firdiana, 2017). The effectiveness of a principal's visionary leadership is further strengthened by internal attributes, including the ability to anticipate future challenges, a strong sense of responsibility, perseverance, and integrity.

This study aims to examine the contribution of comprehensive leadership, particularly the interplay between a school principal's visionary leadership and the ethical culture present within the school environment. From this perspective, the study seeks to identify how principals carry out their leadership roles, enhance educational quality, and offer a deeper understanding of visionary leadership grounded in ethical school culture. This research goes beyond theoretical discussion by exploring how principals enact leadership within the ethical frameworks of their institutions. In doing so, it provides a more contextually rich understanding of school leaders' visionary orientation. This study also uses a systematic literature review to establish a solid basis for future investigations into related themes. By examining the leadership responsibilities of school principals, the research offers opportunities for a deeper understanding of how visionary leadership and ethical culture contribute to improving school quality. In this way, the study is expected to offer meaningful insights and make a significant contribution to educational theory and practice within school settings.

METHODS

This study employs a systematic literature review (SLR) as the primary analytical method to critically examine theoretical frameworks and empirical evidence on visionary leadership grounded in ethical principles to enhance educational institution quality. The selection of the SLR approach is supported by three key considerations: its ability to 1) facilitate cross-disciplinary examination across diverse scientific perspectives; 2) integrate multiple conceptual models with practical applications in the field; and 3) enable comparative evaluation of the research methodologies adopted in earlier studies (Zakaria et al., 2021). This analytical process not only identifies existing gaps in the literature but also creates opportunities for developing new perspectives, particularly those related to strengthening digital-era competencies within learning environments (Connolly et al., 2019). The importance of this approach becomes even more evident when considering the complexity of modern educational leadership, which demands multidimensional, holistic analysis. For the literature search, the study employed Publish or Perish, a well-established tool for gathering and evaluating academic citations. The search drew upon two major scholarly databases—Google Scholar and Scopus. Google Scholar offers extensive multidisciplinary academic resources, while Scopus provides rigorously indexed, peer-reviewed articles supported by reliable citation metrics. The collected data are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. List of Keywords Used in Literature Searches

Literature Search	Keyword
Google Scholar and Scopus in Publish or Perish	Visionary leadership
	Visionary leadership, principal
	Institutional leadership, ethical culture
	Head leadership, ethical culture
	Principal leadership, school quality
	Ethical culture, school quality
	Visionary leadership, school principal, ethical culture, and school quality

A thorough literature search was undertaken to examine the role of school principals' visionary leadership grounded in ethical culture in improving school quality, covering publications from the past decade (2013–2023). The review followed the PRISMA protocol, a widely accepted standard for conducting systematic reviews, and utilized multiple academic databases—Google Scholar and Scopus—accessed through the Publish or Perish application. The initial search produced 483 references. After eliminating 76 duplicates, 407 sources moved to the screening phase. During this stage, 81 items were excluded because they were not journal articles, leaving 326 references that satisfied the basic inclusion requirements.

The subsequent filtering phase focused on retaining studies published within the last five years (2019–2023). This refinement was based on the assessment that older publications had become less relevant due to rapid shifts in educational practices and leadership frameworks. Additional exclusions were made for articles that lacked sufficient depth or did not adequately address the research criteria. Ultimately, 113 sources—including peer-reviewed journal articles and conference papers—were identified as meeting the core selection standards. Further assessment revealed that many of the remaining studies did not directly engage with the central theme of principal leadership strategies grounded in ethical culture. As a result, 89 articles were excluded because they did not provide sufficient discussion on this critical dimension of school leadership. Ultimately, 24 articles met the criteria for comprehensive analysis (Table 2), representing sources that closely aligned with the aims and parameters of the study.

Table 2. Summary of Literature Data on Principals' Visionary Leadership Based on Ethical Culture

Author	Year	Method	Visionary Leadership of School Principals
Huma	2023	Mix Method	Influence, Responsibility, Empowerment
Jedi et al.	2022	Deskriptive Approach	Visibility, Innovation, Visionary
Gonzales	2022	Descriptive Correlational Research	Ethics, Innovation, Impact
Lumbantobing and Ashlan	2023	Quantitative	Influence, Impact, Commitment
Poonvichaen and Sutheejariyawat	2022	Participatory Action Research	Anticipation, Visionary, Responsibility
Kadir et al.	2020	Quantitative	Inspiration, Empowerment, Mobilization
Mohamadi and Ghanbari	2022	Quantitative	Impact, Innovation, Development
Liu et al.	2022	Qualitative	Inspiration, Responsibility, Direction
Daş et al.	2022	Descriptive Approach	Evolution, Responsibility, Commitment
Sutoro and Pasla	2020	Qualitative	Visionary, Ethics, Change
Indrati et al.	2022	Qualitative	Mobilization, Direction, Impact
Imron et al.	2023	Qualitative	Visionary, Direction, Change
Muthofin	2020	Qualitative	Impact, Inspiration, Innovation
Pavlik	2018	Qualitative	Evolution, Innovation, Visionary
Luis Radford	2020	Qualitative	Ethics, Integrity, Subjectivity
Douglas Archibald	2021	Descriptive Approach	Evaluation, Analysis, Empowerment
C. Michele Clawson	2019	Qualitative	Visionary, Ethics, Morality
Kerry Barnett	2022	Qualitative	Innovation, Ethics, Visionary
M. Collete Taylor	2020	Qualitative	Change, Influence, Development
Murti Atika	2021	Qualitative	Visionary, Evaluation, Empowerment
Tajmi Mustyari	2019	Qualitative	Evaluation, Inspiration, Innovation

Author	Year	Method	Visionary Leadership of School Principals
Supriyadhi	2023	Qualitative	Inspiration, Integrity, Visionary
Sahrawi	2019	Qualitative	Empowerment, Ethics, Impact
Septeria	2021	Qualitative	Visionary, Integrity, Commitment

This refined selection enhances the review's relevance and precision, ensuring the analysis remains focused on contemporary developments in school leadership and their influence on educational quality. The PRISMA diagram is presented in Figure 1.

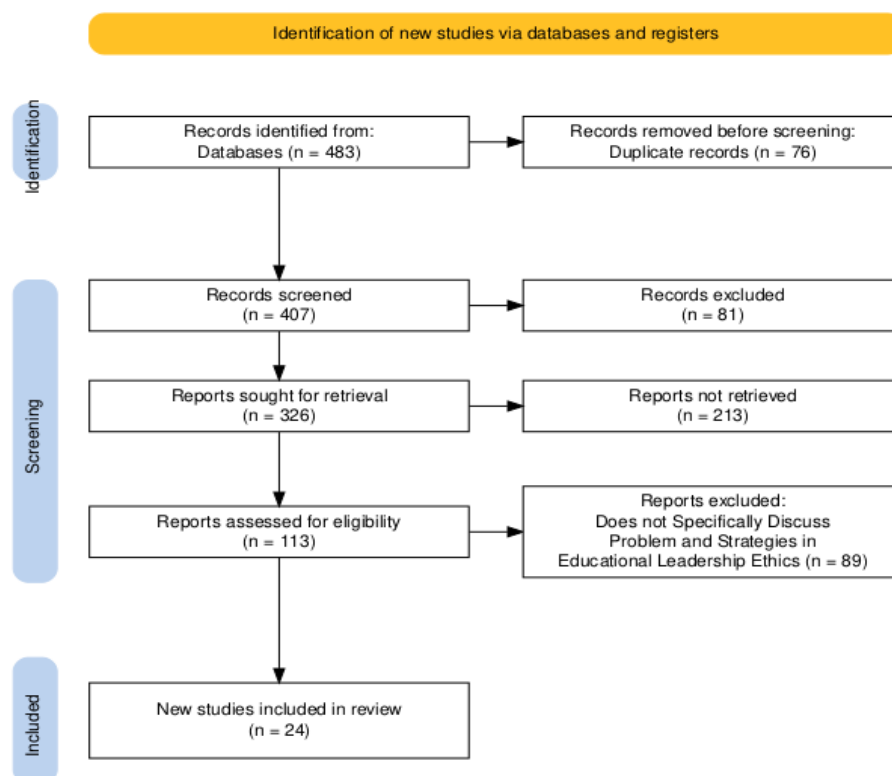


Figure 1. Prisma Diagram and Article Selection

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The review shows that Indonesia produced the highest number of studies on the role of visionary leadership rooted in ethical culture in improving school quality, contributing 10 publications, followed by the United States with three articles.

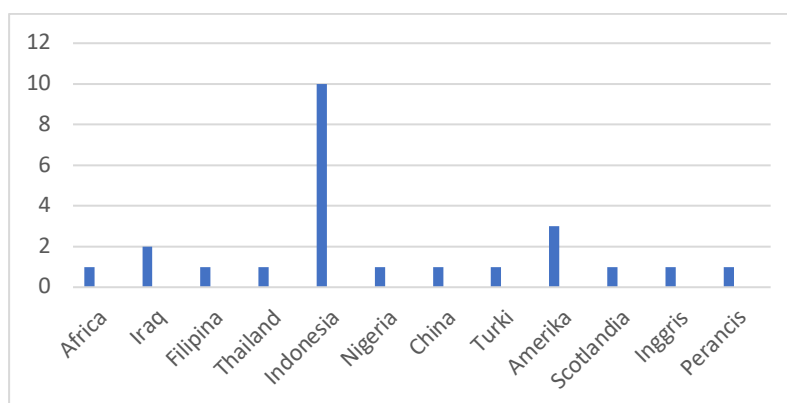


Figure 2. Origin of Publication

As illustrated in Figure 2, scholarly interest in visionary leadership has grown across various countries, indicating its relevance in current educational leadership research. Nevertheless, when examining the distribution of publications by country, it becomes evident that further expansion and deeper academic exploration on visionary leadership in education are still needed to strengthen the global body of knowledge in this field.

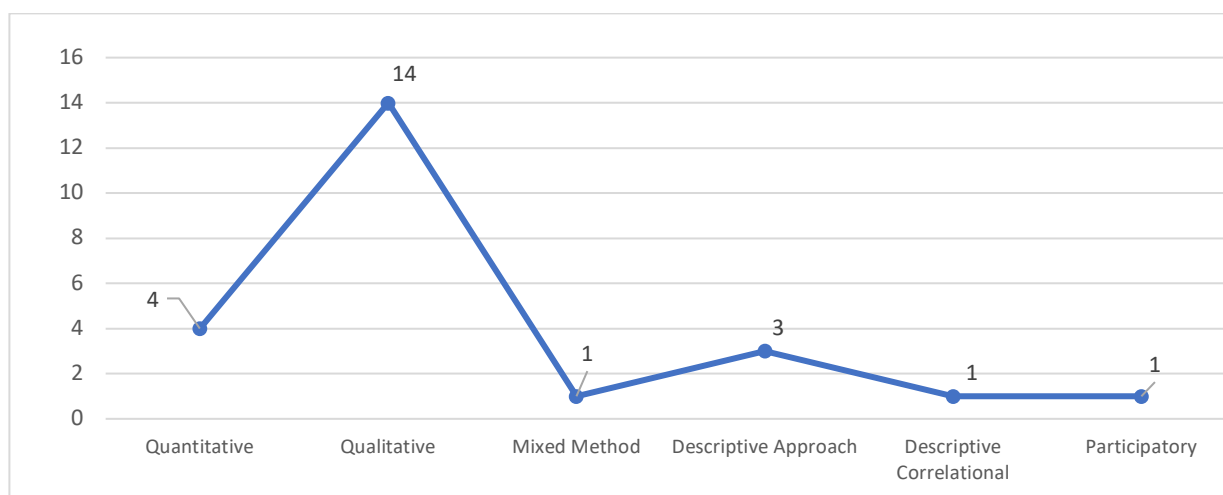


Figure 3. Research Design

Figure 3 shows that the most commonly employed approach in studies examining the role of ethical culture-based visionary leadership in improving school quality is qualitative methodology, with 14 articles. In contrast, mixed-methods, descriptive correlational designs, and participatory research appear least frequently, with only one study each. This indicates a need for further development and expansion of research using mixed-methods, correlational, and participatory designs to enrich the methodological diversity in this field.

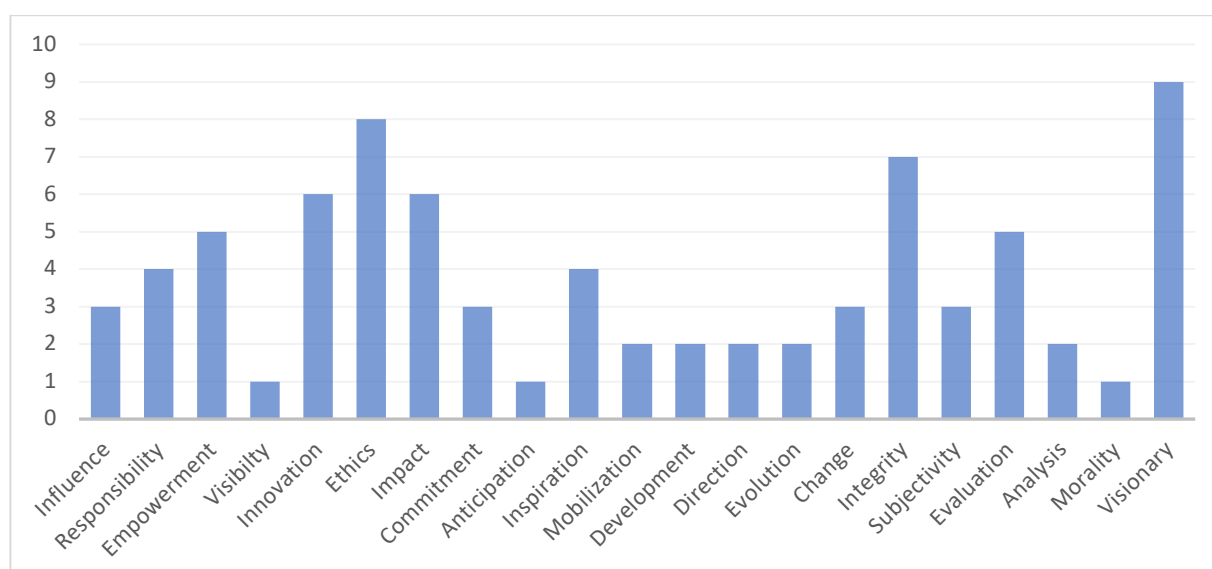


Figure 4. Principals' Visionary Leadership Role

Figure 4 indicates that the visionary leadership model highlights key roles and characteristics demonstrated by leaders in managing educational institutions. Among the components examined in studies on principals' visionary leadership grounded in ethical culture, the most frequently explored is the visionary dimension, appearing in 9 studies. Ethical elements are followed in eight studies, and integrity-related aspects in seven. Meanwhile, components such as visibility, anticipation, and moral conduct appear least often, suggesting they receive comparatively limited attention in the existing literature. Research indicates that leadership paradigms shape organizational development by strengthening the leader's ability to articulate a vision, facilitate communication, and empower human resources. Effective leadership is essential to organizational management because its quality directly influences organizational performance. Leaders must continuously expand their knowledge and capabilities to adapt to rapid changes and increasing complexity in the modern era ([Sunandar & Benty, 2017](#)). Consequently, leadership plays a critical role in shaping the behavior and performance of both individuals and groups within the organization ([Kadir et al., 2020](#)). Strong leadership is required to guide organizational processes, improve outcomes, and support ongoing adaptation and transformation ([Ariyani et al., 2021](#)). The presence of a visionary leader is particularly important, as such leaders rely on cognitive abilities and collaborative behaviors to work effectively with other organizational members. Through this approach, they enhance organizational efficiency and help the institution achieve its desired goals ([Ucan, 2016](#)).

The functioning of any organization inevitably requires effective leadership, as leaders play a key role in influencing individuals to collaborate toward shared objectives. Leadership reflects the approach or style a leader uses to guide, manage, and motivate others, encompassing both interpersonal influence and the ability to steer broader organizational dynamics. Effective leadership emerges when there is mutual respect, reciprocal interaction, and a willingness among individuals to work together (Huma et al., 2023). The function of leadership includes formulating and implementing an open and coherent vision that aligns with individual goals, while emphasizing strong cooperation across all organizational units. Such alignment helps ensure that planned objectives are achieved and contributes to long-term positive outcomes for organizational members (Al-Zoubi et al., 2023).

Leaders can shape the character and behavior of organizational members through several mechanisms: 1) members' willingness to respond positively to the leader's direction; 2) the ability of leaders to guide members' actions toward achieving the organization's long-term goals; and 3) the provision of individualized attention that strengthens relationships between leaders and followers. Berkovich explains that visionary leadership emphasizes strategic commitments that support sustained organizational success, as clear, focused direction helps stimulate progress toward the institution's long-range vision (Berkovich & Bogler, 2020). In addition, visionary leadership is characterized by creativity, persistence, and a strong capacity for innovation within the organization. This form of leadership is effective at facilitating strategic organizational change because it relies on clear communication and the ability to influence members toward achieving shared goals (Juharyanto et al., 2020). Key components of organizational leadership include: 1) problem sensitivity, referring to the ability to recognize challenges and address them effectively; 2) perseverance, demonstrated through maintaining control over one's environment; 3) initiative, shown by proactively generating creative ideas to achieve high performance and implement necessary changes; and 4) originality, reflected in the ability to depart from conventional approaches.

The dimensions of visionary leadership include several key components. First, empowerment, which involves both lower- and higher-level participation in organizational decision-making. Through this process, leaders delegate certain authorities to subordinate levels, reducing supervisory pressure while clarifying and reinforcing the organization's overarching vision within its structural framework. Second, vision, which entails motivating employees to engage in rational decision-making aligned with the organization's values and to use this orientation when formulating future programs and policies that support the institution's long-term aspirations and administrative effectiveness. Third, communication, which serves as a fundamental pillar of organizational life. It represents a basic human activity through which work processes are coordinated, and various forms of communication play a crucial role in shaping the daily experiences and performance of all employees (Al Ajmi, 2024).

Visionary leadership is closely linked to the strategic process, as an organization's strategy reflects its desired future state and the steps required to achieve it. The role of a visionary leader is to inspire and mobilize the organization's members toward these long-term goals. Such leadership is especially critical in educational institutions, which are expected to advance and serve as centers of community aspirations (Devi et al., 2023). Visionary leaders rely on innovative, unconventional ideas to engage and motivate followers to support new organizational directions. They encourage members to challenge existing practices, redefine priorities, and work collectively toward improved outcomes. Moreover, visionary leaders possess the ability to shape organizational structures that can adapt to the complexities and rapid changes of the modern era, while aligning employee motivations and behaviors with ongoing transformation efforts (Mohamadi & Ghanbari, 2022).

Visionary leadership involves several key stages: creating the vision, articulating it, transforming it into shared meaning, and ultimately implementing it within the organization (Lumbantobing & Ashlan, 2023). In addition, a visionary leader must foster innovation and adopt three core perceptions that shape how individuals develop into effective leaders. These principles include: 1) leadership does not originate from formal position—relying solely on positional authority reflects hierarchy rather than genuine leadership capable of creating change; 2) leadership is demonstrated through consistent actions that align with stated commitments; and 3) effective leadership requires genuine follow-through, achieved through strong relationships between leaders and followers that meet their needs for credibility, inspiration, and efficiency (Gkorezis, 2016).

The quality of education within a school is strongly linked to the visionary leadership practices demonstrated by its administrators, as a well-articulated vision enables leaders to anticipate future needs and developments (Thaochalee et al., 2023). Leaders play a crucial role in directing employees toward institutional goals by influencing their behavior and creating a more effective and dynamic administrative environment (Sunandar & Sa'diyah, 2024). Their responsibilities extend beyond formulating the vision; leaders must also communicate it clearly and provide the necessary resources for its implementation. Fulfilling these tasks requires a range of competencies and traits, which vary depending on the leader's knowledge and the five indicators of visionary leadership identified by Gonzales (2022): the ability to develop a vision both rationally and intuitively, objectivity in decision-making, and the credibility of the vision in relation to actual conditions. From this perspective, researchers argue that visionary leadership is among the most effective leadership models in

organizations, as its innovative orientation and forward-looking perspective enable leaders to anticipate future challenges and position the institution to overcome them (Siregar et al., 2022).

Leaders are expected to maintain control by demonstrating the ability to delegate responsibilities, distribute workloads fairly, and keep team members focused and motivated toward achieving clearly defined goals (Öngel et al., 2022). In the school context, the principal as a visionary leader is the figure who opens new perspectives and possibilities for the institution. School effectiveness, therefore, is strongly influenced by the presence of such leaders working collaboratively with teachers. They are responsible for crafting a compelling vision that guides the institution toward success, formulating strategies aligned with that vision, and moving decisively toward shared goals through a proactive approach that transforms potential threats into opportunities (Cai et al., 2023). Visionary leadership has emerged as a contemporary approach well-suited to today's dynamic environment, as its strength lies in the leader's forward-oriented ideas and their ability to engage subordinates in joint decision-making. This collaboration fosters a shared vision that equips the organization to anticipate and navigate future challenges (Mutohar et al., 2020).

Visionary leadership can translate aspirations into reality by unlocking human potential, fostering a spirit of challenge toward existing conditions, and encouraging necessary reforms for meaningful improvement. In the context of education, visionary leadership is crucial for elevating the overall quality of schools. Several scholars have outlined the essential traits of visionary leadership, one of them being Supriyadhi et al. (2023), who identifies fifteen key characteristics: 1) detail-oriented and aware; 2) innovative; 3) confident; 4) diligent; 5) persistent; 6) an effective communicator; 7) strategic in thinking; 8) dedicated; 9) humble; 10) empowering; 11) service-oriented; 12) growth-minded; 13) ethical; 14) caring; and 15) inspiring. These characteristics collectively illustrate how visionary leaders motivate their members, create meaningful change, and sustain progress within educational institutions.

Schine outlines ten characteristics of visionary leadership, which include: 1) being innovative; 2) persistent; 3) willing to take risks; 4) organized; 5) enthusiastic; 6) consistent and focused; 7) open to listening to others; 8) charismatic; 9) responsible; and (10) optimistic (Supriyadhi et al., 2023). In carrying out leadership to enhance educational quality, a visionary leader must fulfill two essential roles: first, serving as a direction setter, and second, creating and communicating a compelling vision that motivates and convinces staff that the leader truly embodies visionary qualities (Zhang et al., 2021). Furthermore, the role of visionary leadership within the framework of total quality management involves not only the ability to formulate a forward-looking vision and strategic steps but also the capability to lead continuous improvements in the overall quality of education (Gonzales, 2022).

CONCLUSION

A comprehensive evaluation of existing studies indicates that visionary leadership grounded in ethical culture plays a pivotal role in enhancing school quality. The review shows that Indonesia dominates scholarly contributions in this domain with 10 publications, considerably more than the United States, which produced three studies. Nevertheless, methodological diversity remains limited, underscoring the need for further research employing mixed-methods, descriptive-correlational designs, and participatory inquiry. Examination of the visionary leadership framework points to three core components: 1) empowering personnel through broader involvement in decision-making; 2) constructing an inclusive, forward-looking vision; and 3) establishing strong communication systems to support organizational cooperation. Effective enactment of this leadership style requires leaders to combine creativity, sensitivity to emerging issues, and proactive initiative with structured processes for formulating and translating their vision into action. In practice, the school principal serves not only as the architect of strategic direction but also as the driver of organizational transformation, fostering an ethical and collaborative culture. The evidence underscores that innovation, ethical commitment, and communicative competence are central to achieving successful leadership outcomes. Consequently, policy efforts should prioritize leadership development programs that integrate future-oriented capabilities with ethical value formation, reinforced by collaborative practices.

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