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The Leadership Role of School Principals in Curriculum Management: Systematic Literature Review Analysis

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Abstract	The role of the principal in curriculum management is critical to ensure effective implementation and alignment with educational standards and objectives. This study aims to determine the role of principals in curriculum management based on a systematic review of the literature using NVivo software. This research uses the SLR method with an inductive approach, and the analysis is carried out using NVivo software. A literature review study using NVivo found that: 1) After screening with inclusion and exclusion criteria, the number of relevant articles was 21. The articles are spread across various journals, with the highest number being four articles in the journal "School Leadership and Management"; 2) Principals have diverse roles in curriculum management, with the terms leadership, principal, curriculum, transformation, management, and supervision being the main focus; 3) The role of the principal in curriculum management has intrinsic and extrinsic factors based on a literature review using NVivo software that shows the conclusion that the factors of the principal's role in curriculum management include leadership, decision making, and coordination. This research provides a deep understanding of the role of principals in curriculum management, which can be a foundation for the professional development of principals and the improvement of the education system. By understanding the role and factors that influence it, educational institutions can identify problems and find more effective solutions to improve the quality of education.
Keywords	Leadership Role; School Principals; Curriculum Management; Systematic Literature Review; NVivo Software

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1. INTRODUCTION

The role of principals in curriculum management is crucial for ensuring effective implementation and alignment with educational standards and objectives. Firstly, principals are responsible for collaboratively guiding teachers through the curriculum implementation process (Maphalala et al., 2023; Sofiah et al., 2023; Zeybeko & Tabancalı, 2009). To achieve this, they must possess in-depth knowledge of the curriculum, its underlying paradigms, and how to interpret it for practical application (A. Mummuh, 2022; Kandimba et al., 2023). Additionally, effective principals adapt leadership skills such as communication, problem-solving, and delegating tasks to capable individuals (Daulay et al.,

2022; E. Pacis & T. Salvador, Ed.D, 2023; Sunaengsih et al., 2019).

The principal's leadership role in curriculum management has evolved significantly over time, with a growing emphasis on instructional leadership. This shift highlights the importance of principals in improving curriculum delivery and student outcomes (Maphalala et al., 2023; Mestry & Govindasamy, 2021; Reyes et al., 2023). By focusing on instructional leadership, principals can provide targeted intervention and support to teachers and middle managers, enhancing their capacity to deliver the curriculum effectively (Chabalala & Naidoo, 2021b). Such support is crucial for reversing the trend of failing schools and promoting the professional development of teachers (Puruwita et al., 2022).

School principals are crucial in curriculum planning, implementation, and evaluation (Kempa et al., 2023; Mubarika et al., 2023; Pilli, 2014). Their active involvement in curriculum development ensures that documents are well-written and aligned with national and state standards (Do, 2020; Bano, 2022; Yu, 2023). Despite these expectations, research highlights a gap between the behaviors of school leaders and the desired outcomes of curriculum development, including document quality, alignment with standards, teacher understanding, and student learning outcomes (Al Shebli, 2023; Matowo & Tenha, 2023; Pant, 2023; Shabalala et al., 2023).

To address this gap, principals should actively promote and support teachers' professional development in curriculum implementation. By creating opportunities and providing necessary tools and resources, principals can empower teachers to effectively utilize new curriculum and assessment documents (Govindasamy & Mestry, 2022; Saeed & Ain, 2022; Yu, 2023). In this regard, effective principals act as both instructors and facilitators in staff development initiatives, emphasizing the significance of curriculum implementation (Fatchurrochman et al., 2022; Young, 2022).

Effective curriculum management is essential to ensure that students receive a high-quality education that meets the requirements of a dynamic and ever-changing world (Limbong, 2023; Neliwati et al., 2023; Riad, 2022). The curriculum determines what students learn, how they know, and their results. School principals oversee curriculum development and implementation, aligning it with educational standards and ensuring teachers have the resources and support to deliver it effectively (Siregar & Bahrissalim, 2022; Sabrina et al., 2022).

Leadership is essential in forming and managing curriculum in the educational environment. Amid the ever-changing dynamics of curriculum development, the role of school principals is becoming increasingly crucial in determining the direction and quality of education in educational institutions (Hambali et al., 2023). This study aims to delve deeply into the role of principals in curriculum management, systematically reviewing the literature to identify and analyze the latest trends, gaps, and innovation potential in this regard.

Although many studies have revealed the critical role of principals in curriculum management, knowledge gaps still need to be filled. There is a paradigm shift in the approach to leadership in educational institutions, where the principal is not only considered an administrator but also an agent of change that affects the effectiveness of the curriculum. Recent studies tend to highlight new aspects such as distributive leadership, collaboration, and transformational in the context of curriculum management. However, a deeper understanding of how principals integrate these various leadership roles is needed to improve curriculum quality.

This research underscores the critical need for active involvement and support from school principals in the curriculum and assessment development processes and areas often lacking. Principals are expected to oversee curriculum writing, ensure alignment with established standards, and offer guidance and assistance to teachers during implementation. Effective curriculum leadership by principals is imperative for driving continuous improvements in student achievement. However, despite the acknowledged importance of principals' roles in curriculum management, the existing literature reveals a conceptual gap in understanding their involvement's comprehensive and theoretical

aspects. While numerous studies have addressed the topic, few have thoroughly examined principals' multifaceted role in curriculum management. Recognizing the broad and nuanced nature of principals' involvement, this study aims to address this gap by conducting a comprehensive literature review to synthesize the diverse roles of school principals in curriculum management. By doing so, this study offers a clearer understanding of the pivotal role principals play in shaping curriculum outcomes.

Research on the role of school principals in curriculum management has far-reaching implications for improving the overall quality of education. By deeply understanding the role and strategies of effective leadership in curriculum management, educational institutions can be more responsive to changes in educational demands and student needs. In addition, this research also makes a meaningful contribution to preparing prospective principals and improving quality leadership capacity at the primary and secondary education levels.

The results of this study are expected to provide a deeper understanding of effective leadership practices in curriculum management to education practitioners, policymakers, and academics. In addition, the findings of this study can also be the basis for developing training and professional development programs for school principals, as well as formulating more appropriate policies to improve the quality of education at the institutional level.

This study's main objective is to systematically analyze the existing literature regarding the role of principals in curriculum management. Thus, this research will provide a comprehensive overview of recent trends, knowledge gaps, and innovation potential in the context of school leadership. Through the achievement of this goal, it is hoped that this research can make a meaningful contribution to the development of educational leadership theory and practice relevant to contemporary needs. This research will take a systematic approach to reviewing the latest literature on the role of principals in curriculum management. Considering the solid conceptual framework and appropriate research methods, this research is expected to provide a more profound and relevant understanding of the complexity of the principal's role in managing the curriculum in educational institutions.

2. METHODS

Design Review

This literature review study reveals the principal's role in curriculum management. An integrative review process is used to gain a global understanding of this phenomenon. According to Hafidhah & Yandari, there are three systematic stages of a literature review using Nvivo software: 1) the preparation stage, 2) the analysis stage, and 3) the literature review writing stage (Hafidhah & Yandari, 2021). The following stages of the systematic literature review with Nvivo software can be seen in Figure 1.
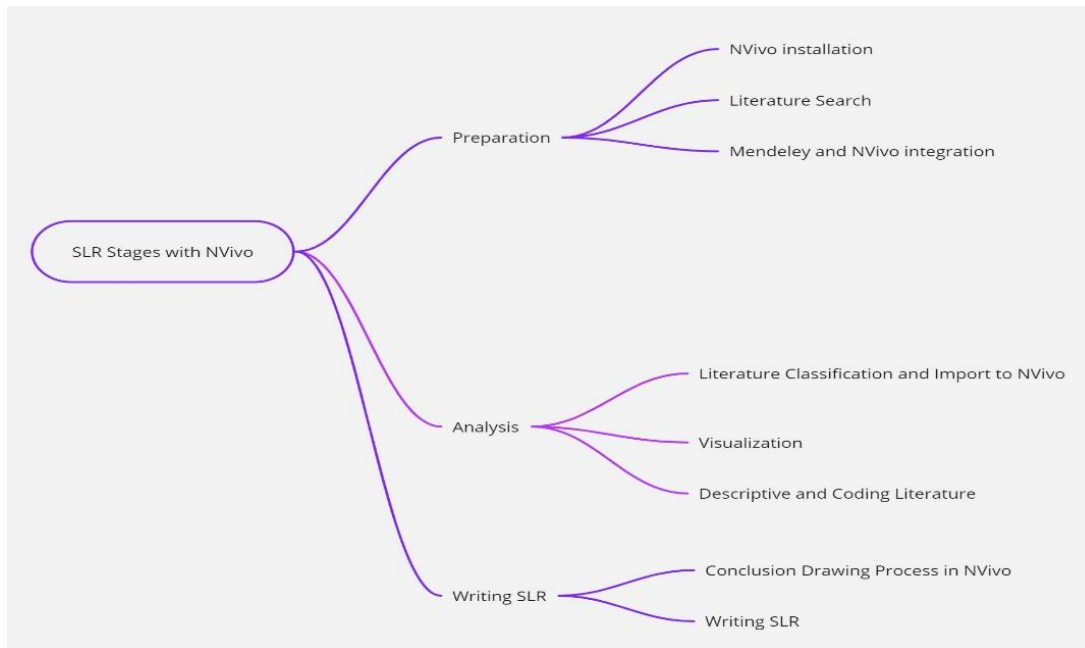
Figure 1. Mind Map Stages of Systematic Literature Review with NVivo

Search Strategy

The search for literature sources focuses on articles that discuss the principal's leadership role in curriculum management. To facilitate literature search, we use specified searches and adopt search keyword connections using "OR" and "AND." The literature search of this study used the keywords "role of the school principal" OR "school principal" AND "curriculum management" on the Google Scholar online database. In addition, to avoid bias in the results of the literature review analysis, we used literature data, which included titles, abstracts, and keywords. The decision not to use the whole paper is because it is feared that the results of qualitative analysis with Nvivo will produce biased data. After all, all texts in the full paper, including supporting theory studies, will be analyzed. However, if you only use titles, abstracts, and keywords, it will focus on published research results. Table 1 shows the search criteria for literature reviews on Google Scholar.

Table 1. Literature Search Indicators

Aspects	Description
Source	Google Scholar
Era	2013-2023
Article Type	Research Articles published in Scopus-indexed journals
Field	Education Management
Access Type	All-access
Search Terms	"role of the school principal" OR "school principal" AND "curriculum management"

Search Criteria

Table 2 details the inclusion and exclusion criteria applied to this review. The study of curriculum management includes curriculum planning, implementation, and evaluation, but this article will discuss curriculum implementers. That is, the study focuses on the role of the principal in curriculum management.

Table 2. Search Criteria Restrictions

Focus	Exception
Research Articles published in Scopus-indexed journals	Research articles not published in Scopus-indexed journals, proceedings, book chapters, or book reviews.
Title, abstract, keywords, and full paper	-
All Scopus-indexed research articles that can be accessed	All research articles that can be accessed but not indexed by Scopus
All research methods	-
All articles in English	All articles that do not use English

Data Analysis

Literature search results in the form of relevant PDFs through Google Scholar are imported into the Mendeley software to be filtered according to the inclusion and exclusion criteria in Table 2. Then, the filtered articles are exported into Nvivo software and contain titles, abstracts, keywords, and full papers. The article data file was processed using Nvivo to map 1) the unit of analysis used in the article, that is, researchers can determine the unit of analysis based on the characteristics of the study; 2) the theories used, that is researchers understand about theories in identifying and deciphering relationships between relevant variables in the literature under study, as well as gaining deeper insight into the phenomenon being studied; 3) intrinsic factors, that is researchers can use features such as coding or category creation that allow them to identify and analyze relevant characteristics of the literature source under study; 4) extrinsic factors, i.e. researchers can use features such as coding or building conceptual models to identify and analyze relevant factors from the literature sources under study; and 5) further research recommendations, yaitu provide direction for future researchers to continue studies or explore certain aspects that have not been fully revealed in the existing literature. The analysis phase on the Nvivo 12 Plus is carried out in stages, which include:

a. The first stage is autocode analysis. This analysis is done to find the theme automatically.

b. The second stage is theme selection from autocoded results. The themes selected by the focus of the study, namely, the principal and curriculum management, will be discussed. At this stage, inappropriate themes will be eliminated, and only relevant themes.

c. The third stage is the grouping of codes on the role of the principal in curriculum management. At this stage, a grouping of similar themes is carried out about the role of the principal in curriculum management.

The fourth stage is the presentation of data. This step is the finalization of Nvivo's analysis to map the theme of the role of principals in curriculum management.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Findings

Number of articles by journal name

A literature search through the Google Scholar database found research articles published in Scopus-indexed journals, including as many as 87 articles about the role of principals in curriculum management. However, after screening based on predetermined criteria with inclusion and exclusion criteria, 21 articles were found (see Figure 2).
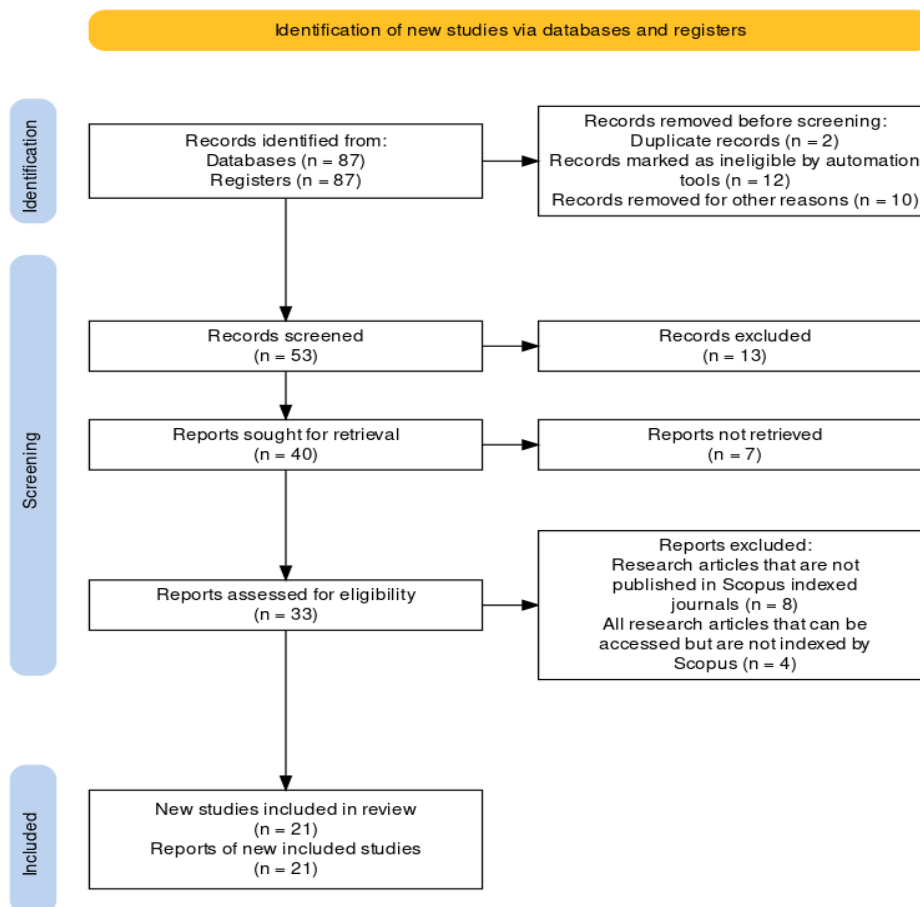
Figure 2. PRISMA Flow Diagram

Table 3. Number of Articles by Journal Name

Nu.	Journal Name	Number of Articles
1	School Leadership and Management	4
2	Educational Management Administration and Leadership	2
3	South African Journal of Education	2
4	Academic Journals Educational Research and Reviews	1
5	British Journal of Educational Technology	1
6	Education as Change	1
7	Educational Research Review	1
8	Educational Review	1
9	European Journal of Education	1
10	European Journal of Educational Research	1
11	Interchange	1
12	Heliyon	1
13	International Journal of Productivity and Performance Management	1
14	Sustainability Science	1

Nu.	Journal Name	Number of Articles
15	South African Journal of Childhood Education	1
16	Review of Educational Research	1
17	Journal of Digital Learning in Teacher Education	1
	Total	
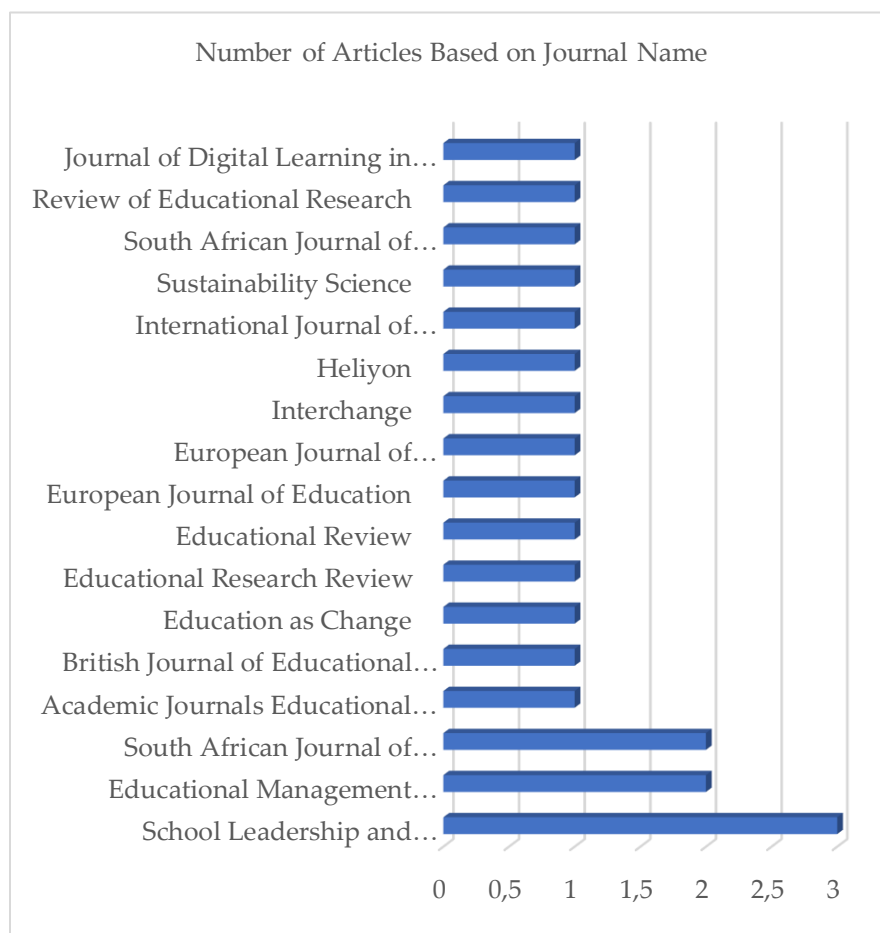
Graph 1. Number of Articles by Journal Name

Analysis of Literature Review using NVivo: the Role of Principal Leadership in Curriculum Management

Qualitative data analysis, including titles, abstracts, keywords, and full papers using Nvivo, shows that principals play a role in curriculum management. The terms related to the principal's leadership role in curriculum management varied widely. Still, we conducted an in-depth analysis to name-label the principal's leadership role in curriculum management based on the terms found. The label or naming of the role of the principal in curriculum management is divided into six main terms: leadership, principals, curriculum, transformation, management, and supervision. In the next step, the results of grouping the principal's leadership role in curriculum management were analyzed using the hierarchy chart exploration technique, as shown in Figure 3. Figure 3 shows that the wider the area of the chart hierarchy, the more widely discussed the term is in the article and is an essential focus of study.
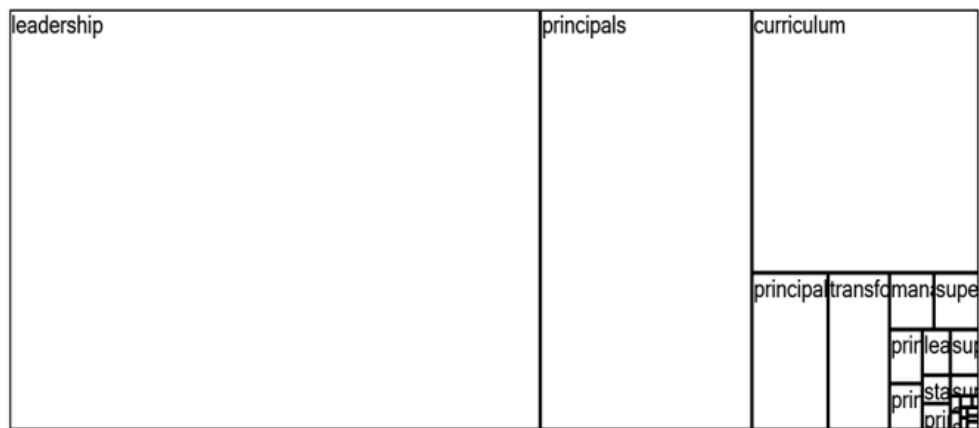
Figure 3. Hierarchy Chart of Principals' Leadership Roles in Curriculum Management

Discussion

This literature review also revealed that the intrinsic factor in the principal's leadership role in curriculum management in 21 articles analyzed in NVivo, namely 1) Principals as curriculum managers, supervisors, and innovators (Connolly et al., 2019; Gawlik, 2018); 2) Principals build individual and collective capacity for curriculum management (Gawlik, 2018); 3) Principals' instructional leadership skills; 4) Effective collaboration, communication, and delegation of tasks between principals, education personnel and teachers are essential (Mestry & Govindasamy, 2021); 5) The role of instructional leadership to transactional and transformational leadership; 6) The headmaster as the determinant of the direction of the school (Naidoo, 2019); 7) The principal acts as the curriculum leader; 8) Principal's leadership style (Azuraida & Oliver, 2016); 9) The principal's role as a learning leader (Clausen et al., 2019); 10) The principal allocates resources (Chabalala & Naidoo, 2021); 11) Clear goal setting, curriculum management, and teaching evaluation (Leithwood et al., 2020; Mestry et al., 2013); 12) School principals feel professionally obligated to implement the curriculum (Mestry et al., 2013); 13) School principals have difficulty managing curriculum that often changes (Sepuru & Mohlakwana, 2020); 14) Principals lead continuous improvement (Blau & Presser, 2013); and 15) Principals focus on budget changes and reallocation of curriculum management(Hanafi et al., 2021).

While the extrinsic factors of the principal's leadership role in curriculum management in this study are 1) Principals' curriculum choices influenced by state standards (Gawlik, 2018); 2) Effective collaboration, communication, and teamwork are essential (Mestry &; Govindasamy, 2021); 3) Principals face challenges like diverse managerial activities and unexpected crises (Naidoo, 2019); 4) Curriculum management plans should include teaching and learning expectations (Azuraida &; Oliver, 2016); 5) Principals' support is crucial for teachers to enhance curriculum delivery (Chabalala &; Naidoo, 2021); 6) Principals delegate curriculum management to deputy principals (Mestry et al., 2013); 7) Principals delegate curriculum management to deputy principals (Mestry et al., 2013); 8) School principals lack curriculum knowledge (Sepuru &; Mohlakwana, 2020); 9) School vision, staff expectations, and organisational culture (Daniëls et al., 2019); 10) Principals focus too much on policy, social support, and financial dimensions (Hanafi et al., 2021); 11) Principals delegate curriculum responsibilities to various staff levels (Connolly et al., 2019); 12) The role of the principal is influenced by the policy environment, faculty capacity, and time allocation(Clausen et al., 2019); 13) Principal's role involves curriculum management, leadership, and school culture (Rianawaty et al., 2021); 14) Curriculum management involves supporting teacher teaching practices and professional development (Liebowitz &; Porter, 2019); 15) Principals focus on mandated or measured strategies (Perry et al., 2019); and 16) Specialized curriculum knowledge is required for managing different school curricula (Sepuru &; Mohlakwana, 2020).

From the findings presented, it can be concluded that the role of the principal in curriculum

management is very complex and involves various intrinsic and extrinsic factors. Intrinsic factors, such as instructional leadership, ability to build individual and collective capacity, and emphasis on resource management, are vital aspects that influence a principal's ability to manage the curriculum effectively. These findings highlight the importance of principals as leaders who deeply understand the curriculum and can facilitate developing and implementing curricula appropriate to student needs and educational standards.

On the other hand, extrinsic factors, such as the influence of state standards in curriculum selection, crisis management challenges, and limited curriculum knowledge, also provide an essential picture of the environment that affects the role of school principals. These findings suggest that principals must not only understand and manage aspects of the curriculum internally in schools but must also be able to navigate external factors that influence curriculum decision-making.

Overall, the discussion of these findings emphasizes the importance of a holistic understanding of the principal's role in curriculum management. Practical implications include the need for ongoing professional development for principals regarding instructional leadership, resource management, and collaboration with various educational stakeholders. In addition, its theoretical implications highlight the complexity of the principal's role in diverse and dynamic contexts and the importance of further research to understand the factors influencing the principal's role in curriculum management.

This study presents significant findings regarding the role of school principals in curriculum management, which is at the core of educational dynamics in educational institutions. The following discussion discusses the implications of these research findings in the context of theory, educational practice, and further research directions.

Theoretical Implications

The findings of this study make a valuable contribution to the development of educational leadership theory. Distributive, collaborative, and transformational leadership concepts are emerging as relevant strategies in curriculum management. The theoretical implication is the recognition that school leadership is no longer limited to administrative aspects alone but also plays an essential role in formulating and implementing curriculum policies that are responsive to student needs and contemporary demands of education (Grimm & Bock, 2022; Leithwood, 2021; Marzuki et al., 2024; Savvopoulos et al., 2024; Stevenson et al., 2020).

Practical Implications

For education practitioners, the findings of this study provide valuable direction in developing the principal's leadership capacity. The importance of distributive and collaborative leadership development is recognized as an essential effort in creating a school culture that is inclusive and responsive to student needs. In addition, the findings also provide a basis for developing training and professional development programs for principals, teachers, and other educational support staff to strengthen their managerial and leadership capacities.

Policy Implications

In the context of education policy formulation, the findings of this study highlight the importance of supporting the role of school principals as agents of change in improving the quality of education at the institutional level. Educational policies that recognize and support the principal's important role in curriculum management can create an environment that supports innovation and continuous improvement in the educational process.

Further Research Directions

Although this study has provided a deeper understanding of the role of principals in curriculum management, some aspects still need further research. First, further research can explore the factors

influencing the implementation of leadership strategies in curriculum management across various educational contexts. Second, further research can also focus on developing and validating measurement instruments to measure leadership effectiveness in the context of curriculum management. In addition, longitudinal studies can be conducted to track the long-term impact of various leadership strategies in improving the quality of education in educational institutions. Thus, advanced research in this field is expected to provide a more comprehensive and in-depth understanding of the role of principals in curriculum management, as well as a more significant contribution to improving the overall quality of education.

4. CONCLUSION

From the results of the literature search and analysis using Nvivo, it is concluded that the role of the principal in curriculum management has various aspects, with leadership, decision-making, and coordination being the main focus. Although there are differences in emphasis on multiple elements, the general conclusions suggest that intrinsic and extrinsic factors influence the role of principals in curriculum management. The implications of this research highlight the importance of ongoing professional development for principals in curriculum management.

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