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Principal's Strategies in Managing Resistance to Change in Elementary Education

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Abstrak

This study aims to analyze the strategies of school principals in managing resistance to change in the elementary school education environment. The background of this research is based on the increasingly complex demands of change in the digital era, which often cause resistance from various parties, especially teachers. The research uses a descriptive qualitative approach with data collection techniques through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation at SDN Gambut 4. The results of the study show that resistance appears in various forms, both overt and implicit, with the main factors being limited understanding of change, low confidence in the use of technology, and increased administrative burden. In overcoming this, school principals implement effective communication strategies, participatory leadership, competency improvement through training, and emotional and familial approaches. This strategy has been proven to be able to reduce resistance and increase teachers' participation and readiness to face change. This research makes a practical contribution in the management of change in elementary schools, especially in creating an adaptive and innovative environment

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Introduction

Education is one of the main pillars in the development of a nation's human resources. Entering the era of the industrial revolution 4.0, the world is facing a very rapid acceleration of technological development and social dynamics. The education sector is one of the fields that most often undergoes changes in order to adapt to the challenges of the times (Adventyana et al., 2024). In the era of globalization and rapid technological development, educational institutions are required to continue to innovate and adapt to changes that occur, both in aspects of curriculum, learning methods, and institutional management. Therefore, education has always been placed as a top priority in various national development programs, and has received special attention from the government and the wider community (Nashihuddin & Choiruddin, 2025). The mindset that is increasingly developing with the demands of the times, requires leaders who are wise and wise and able to actively motivate in improving the performance of their members (Rahmi et al., 2025).

The principal occupies a central position as the leader responsible for the overall process of change in his institution. In schools, the leadership quality of the principal is often a determining factor in the success or failure of an educational institution in achieving the expected goals (Lian & Eddy, 2025). School principals are not only required to have reliable managerial skills, but must also be able to act as effective agents of change able to move all components of the school towards a vision that has been set together. As the main driver, the principal must be able to create a climate that supports learning, including by providing adequate facilities and arranging a good physical environment (Indriyanti et al., 2024). However, efforts to encourage change in the school environment often do not go smoothly. One of the biggest challenges faced is the emergence of resistance or rejection to change from various parties, both from educators, education staff, and parents of students.

Resistance to change is a common phenomenon found in every organization, including educational institutions. In the digital era marked by the rapid development of information and communication technology (ICT), schools are required to continue to adapt in order to be able to answer the challenges of the times. Digital transformation is not limited to the use of technological devices such as computers, tablets, or online learning applications, but includes a change in paradigm, mindset, and work culture in schools (Shah, 2024). In other words, the digitalization of education must be understood as a planned, systematic, and sustainable change management process (Nikmah et al., 2023). This change can come from various factors, ranging from government policies, curriculum innovation, to paradigm shifts in learning methods. Although the main goal

of these changes is to improve the quality of education and its relevance to today's needs, there are often obstacles in the form of resistance from various parties in the education system, including teachers, administrative staff, parents, and even students themselves. Therefore, it is important for all stakeholders to understand effective management strategies so that such resistance can be overcome constructively (Juliastuti et al., 2024).

Resistance essentially arises as a natural human response to uncertainty, fear of role shifts, lack of understanding of the benefits of change, as well as unpreparedness both psychologically and technically. School change is successful if it internalizes the people in the school and institutionalizes it in the daily life of the school (Aulia & Turaya, 2023). In the elementary school environment, this resistance can manifest in various forms, ranging from apathy, inactivity in the implementation of new policies, to open rejection of innovation programs launched by school principals. This condition, if not managed properly, will hinder the pace of development of the overall quality of education (Rafi, 2026).

Studies have shown that the implementation of policy changes, including curriculum transitions such as the Independent Curriculum, often encounters obstacles in the form of resistance from teachers who have long been accustomed to the old pattern (Asrul & Fadli, 2025). High administrative burden, limited facilities, and lack of professional assistance also increase the potential for rejection. In this context, the role of leadership in schools has become very important, especially for principals who are responsible for policy and strategic decision-making in the face of these challenges (Repotiah, 2024). Therefore, the ability of school principals to read situations, understand the roots of resistance, and design contextual strategies is a determining factor for the success of educational transformation at the elementary school level.

A number of previous studies have examined the leadership role of school principals in change management. Research on the role of principals in change management in primary schools emphasizes that principals function as agents of transformation who are able to overcome resistance through effective communication strategies, inclusive leadership, and conflict management. Study Aulia & Turaya, (2023) highlighting the importance of visionary communication and a culture of innovation, Darmawan et al., (2026) demonstrate how adaptive leadership creates a psychologically safe space for teachers to accept change, while Widyanti et al., (2026) emphasizing the effectiveness of managerial leadership in strategic planning and supervision. Overall, these studies confirm that the success of transformative change management in elementary schools depends on the ability of principals to build collaboration, trust, and an atmosphere conducive to the acceptance and implementation of change. The focus of this research is to explore various strategies to overcome resistance in the transformative management of elementary school

education change. Management aspects that are of primary concern include effective communication, inclusive leadership, and conflict management, so as to create an atmosphere conducive to the acceptance and implementation of change optimally (Badawi et al., 2024).

This research was carried out at SDN Gambut 4, an elementary school in Banjar Regency that was chosen because it showed significant development, a stable number of students, and an increase from year to year. The identification of the problems behind this research is the resistance to transformative educational change, especially related to limited resources, low teacher discipline, and lack of community involvement. This condition demands the role of the principal as an agent of change who is able to overcome resistance through effective communication, inclusive leadership, and conflict management. This research is important because it provides a real picture of how the visionary leadership of school principals can create a collaborative culture that is conducive to the acceptance of change, making it relevant to answer the challenges of 21st century education. The aim of the study was to analyze the principal's leadership strategies in overcoming resistance to change in elementary schools, as well as to identify best practices that can be applied in similar contexts. The benefit of this research is that it provides practical recommendations for school principals and education policy makers in managing change effectively. Its contribution lies in strengthening the literature on educational leadership in Indonesia, especially in the context of primary schools, while offering a transformative leadership model that can be used as a reference for further research and managerial practice in the field.

Method

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach that aims to describe in depth the leadership strategy of school principals in managing change resistance in elementary schools. This approach is in accordance with the descriptive qualitative methodology as affirmed Beckman, (2019) Because it is able to produce data in the form of oral and written expressions and behaviors that can be observed directly, thus providing a comprehensive picture of the phenomenon of educational leadership.

The location of the study was determined at SDN Gambut 4, Banjar Regency, an elementary school that was chosen because it showed stable development, an increasing number of students, and had unique characteristics compared to other schools in the region. The subjects of the study include school principals as the main actors in managing change, teachers as policy implementers who often face resistance, and school committees who play a role in supporting the transformation process.

This study uses purposive informant selection. School principals, teachers, and school committees were chosen as informants because they were considered the most relevant and had first-hand experience related to the dynamics of educational change. Thus, the data obtained truly reflects the real conditions on the ground.

The source of research data consists of primary data and secondary data. Primary data was obtained through participatory observation and in-depth interviews with school principals, teachers, and school committees. Meanwhile, secondary data is obtained from school documents in the form of policy archives, meeting records, and administrative documents relevant to the process of changing education.

The data collection technique is carried out through three main methods, namely participatory observation to see firsthand leadership practices in the field, in-depth interviews to explore the experiences and perceptions of informants, and documentation in the form of policy archives and meeting notes. The research instruments used include observation guidelines, interview guidelines, and a list of relevant documents.

Data analysis is carried out through three main stages. First, condense data to reduce complex information into more focused categories. Second, the presentation of data in the form of a systematic descriptive narrative so that it is easy to understand. Third, verification of findings to ensure the consistency and validity of research results so that they can be scientifically accounted for.

The validity of the data is maintained through several strategies, namely extending the research period so that researchers gain a deep understanding, intensive involvement in the field to ensure that data is in accordance with real conditions, and triangulating data sources by comparing the results of observations, interviews, and documentation.

Research Results

Research conducted at SDN Gambut 4 found that resistance to educational change appears in various forms. Some teachers show open rejection, while others show implicit resistance through passivity. The main difficulty experienced by teachers is adapting to new policies, especially the implementation of the Independent Curriculum and the use of digital technology in learning. This condition causes anxiety and inconfidence in operating digital devices. Teachers experience anxiety because they are not used to digital devices, which causes a sense of lack of confidence in operating learning technology.

In addition to technological constraints, teachers also face increasingly complex administrative challenges. Additional tasks such as preparing teaching tools, performance reporting, and digital data input make some teachers feel burdened. This is reflected in

the delay in the preparation of learning tools, lack of innovation, and low participation in training organized by schools. The resistance that arises is more passive, such as apathy and lack of involvement in school activities. As one of the key components in educational operations, school culture includes values, norms, and expectations that apply in the school community.

To achieve educational goals in accordance with the social role of the school, an educational leadership role is needed that must run optimally. Operationally, educational leadership must be effective for the progress of the school organization. In addition, teachers also expressed concern about the increasing administrative burden and complexity of performance demands. Resistance also emerged in the form of concerns about the increasing administrative burden.

Observations show that teachers who feel valued and involved in the learning planning process show higher motivation. Active involvement in determining learning objectives, selecting methods, and drafting evaluation instruments makes planning more contextual and realistic. This has an impact on increasing ownership of new policies and openness in accepting change. This involvement provides a space for teachers to convey ideas, experiences, and obstacles faced in the learning process.

School principals play an important role in reducing resistance through two-way communication strategies. Coordination meetings, informal discussions, and personal approaches are carried out regularly to create an atmosphere of openness. Teachers feel more comfortable conveying the obstacles they face, so that resistance can be identified early and managed constructively. This strategy helps turn passive attitudes into positive engagement in school programs.



Image 1. Interview with the Principal of SDN Gambut

Overall, the results of the study show that resistance at SDN Gambut 4 is not an absolute obstacle, but part of the dynamics of adaptation to change. With effective communication, teacher involvement in decision-making, and the support of school principals in the form

of training and mentoring, resistance gradually decreases. Teachers begin to show openness, active participation, and innovation in learning. These findings affirm the importance of school leadership in creating a work environment conducive to acceptance of change

Strategi Kepala Sekolah Mengatasi Resistensi Perubahan



Image 2. Principal's Strategy Chart in the face of resistance

Educational Change Management

Etymologically, the word change in English is called change. In terminology, change is the transformation from the present state to the expected state in the future, a better state (Nashihuddin & Choiruddin, 2025). Change means doing work with new things, new flows, new technologies, new systems, new procedures and so on that significantly disrupt the old system (Kurnia, 2023). If it is associated with educational institutions, then changes in educational institutions or organizations are changes that occur in the aspect of resources owned by the school, namely changes in human resources, educational equipment resources and so on that are used as priorities to achieve educational targets (Jaya, 2021).

In managing change, educational institutions need to understand that change is not a purely linear process, but is a complex process and often involves the interaction between various internal and external factors. The education process will run well if there is a good management system, this is in accordance with the definition of management is the process of planning, organizing, directing and supervising the efforts of the members of the organization and the use of other organizational resources to achieve the organizational goals that have been set (Martootmodjo, 2023). Therefore, a holistic and sustainable change management approach is needed. This includes an in-depth understanding of the institution's vision and mission, analysis of stakeholder needs and

expectations, and development of comprehensive strategies and action plans (Hamid et al., 2024).

Elementary School Resistance

In the context of talking about organizational change, resistance is an attitude/action of rejecting, rejecting, obstructing, opposing, of the members of the organization to participate or cooperate with the organization along with efforts to make change (Rifa et al., 2022). Organizational change in the public elementary school environment is an inevitable reality in an effort to improve the quality of education and meet the demands of the ever-evolving times. Along with technological developments, changes in education policies, and societal dynamics, public elementary schools are required to continue to adapt and change themselves to remain relevant and effective in achieving educational goals (Hendrawati et al., 2023). Resistance in elementary schools is a phenomenon that arises when teachers, students, and education staff refuse or refuse to accept the changes implemented, either in the form of new curriculum policies, the use of learning technology, or different evaluation methods.

Another strategy that has proven effective is improving teacher competence through training, workshops, and internal mentoring. The principal facilitated activities to strengthen the ability to use learning technology and understand the new curriculum. In addition, emotional and familial approaches are also used to create a comfortable work atmosphere, resolve conflicts through deliberation, and build positive interpersonal relationships. As a result, teacher resistance has gradually decreased, characterized by increased openness to change, active participation in school programs, and the emergence of innovations in learning. Students are now in a dynamic digital environment, so the learning approach must be adaptive, interactive, and based on individual needs.

Discussion

The results of research at SDN Gambut 4 show that teachers' resistance to educational changes does not always appear in the form of direct rejection, but is more often passive. Apathy, lack of participation in school activities, and inactivity in implementing new policies indicate that resistance in the elementary school environment is latent. This condition illustrates the psychological and professional unpreparedness of teachers in dealing with changes in the education system. This phenomenon confirms that resistance is part of organizational dynamics that require the right managerial approach in order to be transformed into positive engagement. This condition is in line with the study of Hendrawati et al. (2023) which emphasized that resistance in elementary school is often

latent, so it requires the right managerial strategy to turn passive attitudes into positive involvement.

The principal applies an emotional and familial approach as the main strategy in managing resistance. Through warm and personal communication, the principal creates a more open and respectful working atmosphere. Coordination meetings, informal discussions, and an interpersonal approach help teachers feel heard and valued. This two-way communication strategy has proven effective in building trust and reducing resistance. This is in line with the theory Badawi et al., (2024) which emphasizes that open communication is the key to overcoming resistance to change. In addition, this approach also strengthens the view Nikmah et al., (2023) that educational change is not only technical, but also includes cultural and mindset transformations.

Participatory leadership applied by school principals is an important factor in creating teacher involvement in the new policy. The principal involves the teacher in the decision-making process, starting from the preparation of learning tools to the selection of evaluation methods. This involvement fosters a sense of ownership of school policies and increases teachers' commitment to change. These findings support the theory of Lian & Eddy (2025) which states that participatory leadership is able to increase the involvement and responsibility of organizational members for change. With active participation, teachers are no longer the object of policy, but the subject that helps determine the direction of educational change in schools. This involvement makes teachers better understand the purpose of change and feel that they have a shared responsibility in carrying it out.

In addition to communication and participation, improving teacher competence through internal training and mentoring is an effective strategy in reducing resistance. The principal seeks to strengthen teachers' ability to use learning technology and understand the new curriculum. These efforts help teachers overcome insecurity and increase readiness to face the demands of education reform. With increased competence, teachers are more confident and able to adapt to innovative learning systems. Improving teacher competence through training, workshops, and internal mentoring is another effective strategy. The principal seeks to strengthen teachers' ability to use learning technology and understand the new curriculum. This is in line with the view of Hamid et al. (2024) that human resource development is an important part of change management. With increasing competence, teachers are better prepared to face the demands of change and resistance gradually decreases.

The emotional and familial approach applied by the principal also plays a big role in creating a harmonious work environment. The principal resolves conflicts through

deliberation and builds positive interpersonal relationships with all school residents. This strategy reinforces the theory of Aulia & Turaya (2023) which emphasizes that the success of change depends heavily on the leader's ability to build healthy interpersonal relationships. With a humanist approach, teachers feel more valued and motivated to accept change. A comfortable and trusting work environment is the foundation for the creation of a collaborative culture in schools.

Overall, this study confirms that resistance is not an absolute barrier, but rather part of the dynamics of reasonable adaptation in educational organizations. The success of the principal at SDN Gambut 4 in managing resistance can be seen from the increasing openness of teachers, active participation in school programs, and the emergence of learning innovations. This finding is in line with the view of Nashihuddin & Choiruddin (2025) who stated that resistance is part of the process of adaptation towards better change. By combining effective communication, participatory leadership, competency enhancement, and an emotional approach, school principals successfully implement transformative leadership models that are relevant to the context of basic education in Indonesia. This model shows that change can be well received if it is managed through empathy, collaboration, and strengthening the capacity of human resources.

Conclusion

Research conducted at SDN Gambut 4 concluded that resistance to changes in basic education appears in both open and passive forms. Teachers have difficulty adapting to new policies, especially related to the implementation of the Independent Curriculum and the use of digital technology. In addition, the increasingly complex administrative burden causes a sense of burden, so that some teachers show apathy, lack of innovation, and lack of participation in school activities. To overcome this, the principal implements effective two-way communication strategies through meetings, informal discussions, and a personal approach. This step creates an atmosphere of openness so that teachers feel appreciated and more comfortable conveying the obstacles they face. Principals also involve teachers in the planning and decision-making process, which fosters a sense of ownership of school policies and increases their commitment to change. In addition, improving teacher competence through training, workshops, and internal mentoring is an important strategy in strengthening readiness to face the demands of education reform. Teachers who receive support in mastering technology and understanding the new curriculum show increased confidence and higher involvement. An emotional and familial approach also plays a role in creating a harmonious work environment. The principal resolves conflicts through deliberation and builds positive interpersonal relationships, so that teachers feel more valued and motivated to accept change. Overall,

the strategies implemented have been proven to be able to gradually reduce resistance, increase teachers' openness to new policies, strengthen active participation in school programs, and encourage the emergence of learning innovations. The implication of this study is that resistance is not an absolute barrier, but rather part of the adaptive dynamics that can be managed constructively. Therefore, education policies need to support school principals as agents of change by providing autonomy space, empathy-based leadership training, and support for sustainable teacher competency development programs. A holistic transformative leadership model that combines communication, participation, capacity building, and a humanist approach can be used as a practical reference for other elementary schools in Indonesia in managing educational changes in the digital era.

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