

## Leadership Competencies: a School Leader Evaluation

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**ABSTRACT:** *This study aimed at examining how teachers evaluate their principal's leadership competencies in terms of principal-staff relation, organization, and building management, student relationship, curriculum and program development, community, and parent relation. This descriptive qualitative research was conducted at elementary and middle schools. The subjects were 30 teachers. The data were gathered using the Performance Evaluation of Education Leader. The data were analyzed qualitatively and descriptively reported. The findings revealed that the principals at the two schools show different results. The principal of elementary school effectively perform in principal-staff relations, students' relationships, and community and parent relations. Meanwhile, the principal of middle school show effective performance not only in the above three-mentioned aspects but also in organization and building management as well as curriculum and program development.*

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengevaluasi kompetensi kepemimpinan kepala sekolah yaitu hubungan kepala sekolah dengan guru/staf, organisasi dan pengelolaan, hubungan dengan peserta didik, kurikulum dan pengembangan program, serta hubungan orangtua dan masyarakat. Penelitian ini dilakukan di Ssekolah Dasar dan Sekolah Menengah Pertama. Subyek penelitian berjumlah 30 guru. Pengumpulan data menggunakan the Performance Evaluation of Education Leader. Data dianalisis secara kualitatif dan dilaporkan secara deskriptif. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kepala sekolah dari kedua sekolah terteliti menunjukkan hasil yang

berbeda. Kepala SD menampilkan kinerja efektif pada kompetensi hubungan dengan guru/staf, hubungan dengan peserta didik, dan hubungan dengan orangtua dan masyarakat. Sementara kepala SMP menampilkan kinerja yang efektif tidak hanya pada tiga kompetensi yang telah disebutkan tetapi juga pada kompetensi organisasi dan pengelolaan, serta kurikulum dan pengembangan program.

**Keywords:** *a school leader evaluation, leadership competencies*

## INTRODUCTION

Leadership has a strategic position in organizations and is very influential on the performance of an organization. A leader who performs effective leadership enables to activate the entire personnel towards expected goals. On the contrary, an ineffective leader does not own any influence on the organization even his leadership weakens the performance of the organization which eventually results in a chaotic condition. His existence is only a meaningless symbol. Leadership strongly influences the performance of the organization. Thus, it is rational to say that the downturn of education is particularly affected by ineffective leadership performance which does not have any capabilities to design strategic plans in managing and developing the organization. Leadership is a crucial power that ensures the sustainability of organizations. Leadership also supports developing a new vision of organizations that illustrates what they are expected, then, activates changing the organization towards the new vision (Bennis & Nanus, 1985). A school is a community of learners, all stakeholders must retain the core business of school that is a learning process that has two functions. Firstly, to become all members of the school community as effective learners. Secondly, to ensure choosing certain perspectives and knowledge which are relevant to the future (Kapur, 2007). To this respect, questions about how to design learning process-oriented to the future, and what powerful motivation directs a school to one directed point? Then, the answer is principal leadership. Leadership in the context of effective schools has two meanings. The first is related to a principal who guides and directs a school to be a high-performing school. The second is related to the leadership that resulted in an excellent school for other schools. An excellent and effective school produces leadership qualities that can bring the world to a better future.

School leaders need to predict how the world develops and changes social structures since they are aware that all their students will live in the future. The most important aspect of school leaders is that they must have capabilities to escort school vision to all members

of the school community they need to make sure that the shared vision is the real picture of what they are going to achieve. They also need to build a sense of belongings of the entire school communities towards the vision and ensure that along with environmental changes, all members of the community must continuously maintain the vision and understand that changes constantly take place and it is the most important part of the vision (Kapur, 2007).

The characteristics of effective school leaders mentioned above will not happen when the principals do not have leadership qualities and leading skills in managing schools as an educational organization. To measure the success of principal leadership, teachers, staff, students, and stakeholders should evaluate their principals so that the principals will know which factors of their current leaders need to enhance, improve or even change. As a result, the principals could maintain and increase their effective leadership in managing and developing the entire school resources (Syam & Arifin, 2019).

The quality of education with which the principal is specifically an important factor in school reform (Mulcahy, 2019). Many scholars have been researched school leadership. Farah (2013) reported a research review of the characteristics of an effective principal. He stated managing schools is like managing a country so that school principals play the roles of politicians, economists, psychologists, and community experts. All aspects of the school community such as culture, gender, ethnicity, and religion must be very diverse and users of school services in this case the community and parents want satisfaction for all their needs. Papers on the characteristics of effective principals describe how perfect the figure of a school principal is 9 components of a principal's self-evaluation leadership can be used by every principal to assess themselves, namely (1) planning and providing guidelines for school activities; (2) respecting the wishes of the school community, answering and listening to the requirements they put forward; (3) showing and regulating school community without dictating the rules; (4) building networks with the school community and arranging timely meetings; (5) implementing constructive changes in consultation with school members; (6) teaching school members and accepting new ideas; (7) participating in school programs and fostering teamwork; (8) attracting and motivating school members to teach and study hard; and (9) leading the school community in the right direction and taking lessons from them (Farah, 2013).

Furthermore, principals who carry out effective school management have the potential to produce superior young people because the scope of schools can optimize their functions as educational institutions that carry out economic, humanitarian, social, political, cultural, and educational functions. One aspect that can support the implementation of effective school management is the

principal's leadership in making decisions, communicating, directing, and developing the professionalism of teachers and education personnel, solving problems, and evaluating school activities (Suanengsih et al, 2019). In addition, Leithwood et al (2006) asserted that there are seven demands for the success of school leadership, namely (1) leadership is second only to classroom teaching which influences students' learning processes; (2) all successful leaders use the same repertoire of basic leadership practices; (3) the way leaders apply these basic leadership practices, demonstrating their responsiveness to the context in which they work, not dictating otherwise; (4) principals improve learning and teaching indirectly and more strongly through their influence on staff motivation, working conditions and commitment; (5) school leadership has a greater influence on schools and learners when distributed more widely; (6) some distribution patterns are more effective than others; and (7) the slightest personal trait will account for a high proportion of the variation in leadership effectiveness. However, school leaders are understood as decisive actors in improving learning and teaching conditions in schools, relatively little is known about leadership strategies in which principals must dedicate their time and energy to improving outcomes (Liebowitz& Porter, 2019). Among the many studies that investigated the principal leadership, the researchers highlight that the school leadership models so far are still incomplete and the relevant research is still filled with the dominance of the principal's views (Stravakou&Lozgka, 2018). A study by Stravakou&Lozgka (2018) explores the perceptions of pre-service and in-service training teachers about what they expect and want from principals as leaders in schools to be willing to follow them. The research sample consisted of 36 teachers who were purposively recruited. All findings indicate that the ideal principal according to most teachers' views is to have leadership skills, to a much lesser extent have special personality traits, and maintain goals to strive for, while special qualifications are seen as the least desirable by teachers that found in the study.

Considering the importance of this school leader evaluation, this current research would like to examine how teachers evaluate their principal's leadership in terms of principal-staff relation, organization, and building management, student relationship, curriculum and program development, community, and parent relation as well as to compare the principal leadership in schooling practices of both countries. The results of this study are expected to provide best practices of principal leadership which could be a model for school leaders in leading their schools.

## **METHODS**

This descriptive qualitative research (Creswell, 2009 & 2013; Moleong, 2005; Sugiyono, 2013; Yin, 2009) was conducted in two different levels of education, namely elementary and middle schools. This study was conducted at AL-Ya’lu School that is the Islamic high-performing school in Malang city that administering elementary and middle school levels. The participants of this study were 30 teachers, 18 teachers from elementary school, and 12 teachers from middle school. The teachers represented their schools that were chosen by a random sampling method.

For collecting the data on the evaluation of principal effectiveness, the researchers used Performance Evaluation of Education Leader (PEEL) adapted from Gorton (1976) in his book entitled “School Administration”. This instrument has been extensively researched and field-tested. The PEEL contains 5 components of principal leadership competencies. They are principal-staff relations, organization and building management, students’ relationships, curriculum and program development, and community and parent relations. Each of the components provides leading indicators to be evaluated by the teachers. Each indicator should be answered by 6 criteria, namely always, usually, frequently, seldom, never, and no opinion. The first three answers are positive. It means the principals have a good performance related to the indicators of leadership competencies that were being assessed. Conversely, the second-three answers are negative, then, the principals were considered as performing ineffective leadership competencies. This study analyzed the data qualitatively and descriptively reported by using the interactive model of analysis proposed by Miles and Huberman (1998).

**FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

***FINDINGS***

The research findings on the evaluation of principal leadership competencies are presented as the following.

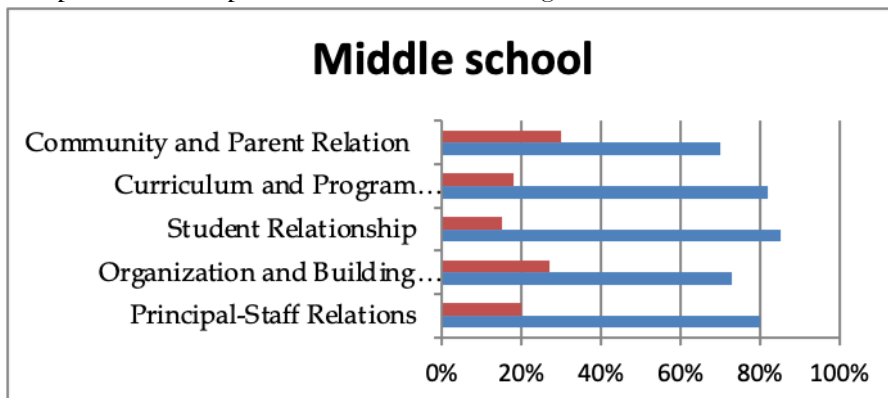


Figure 1: The Finding of School Leader Evaluation at the Middle School

The figure shows that 80% of the teachers assume that their principal performs well in PSR and 73% of them agree that the principal has good performance in OBM. Meanwhile, 85% and 82% of teachers agree that their principal shows better performance both in SR and CPD. Also, the teachers agree that CPR is another competence the principal can perform well. It gets 70%. On the contrary, there are 20% of teachers evaluated their principal as having ineffective leadership in PSR, 27% in OBM, 15% in SR, 18% in CPD, and 30% in CPR.

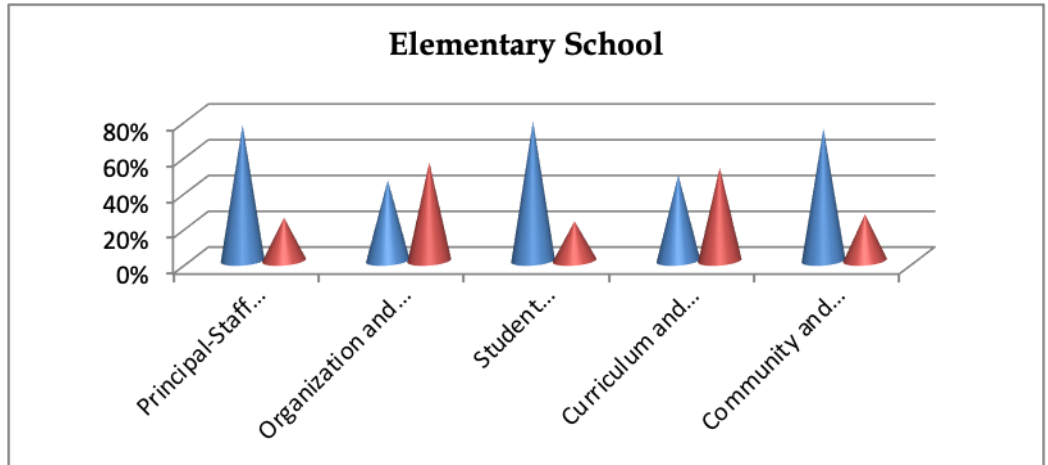


Figure 2: The Finding of School Leader Evaluation at the Elementary School

The result for the elementary school shown by the above figure that there are three components the principal performs well, that are PSR (76%), SR (78%), and CPR (74%). Meanwhile, the principal does not show good performance in OBM as well as in CPD. It obtains 45% and 48% respectively. For the components of PSR, SR and CPR, there are only 24%, 22%, and 26% of teachers categorized their principal as performing ineffective leadership competence. On the other hand, 55% and 52% of teachers agree that their principal performs good leadership for OBM and CPD.

## DISCUSSION

### Principal-Staff Relations

The majority of teachers in all investigated schools evaluated that their principals perform effective leadership practices for principal-staff relations. It was shown by the principal's support to teachers when they find students misbehave and guide the teachers on how to solve the problem. Teachers also can talk freely and openly with the principal since he is accessible whenever he is needed. Besides, the principal was consistent and practiced what he preaches. He delegates responsibilities to teachers and believes the teachers can handle the job. Teachers feel confident that the job is important and their contribution is worthwhile. In addition, the principal respects teachers as human beings and is fair in assigning duties and evaluating teachers or staff members. All areas of interest receive equal treatment by the principal. The teachers also get adequate encouragement and praise from their principals. Furthermore, the principal can make a decision whenever the teachers go to him, they will get an answer. He is also receptive to constructive criticism.

Related to those findings, Price (2011) also examined how effective relationships between principals and teachers shape their

attitudes. The research findings revealed that the principal and teacher relationship affects the level of satisfaction, relationship harmony, and commitment of principals and teachers. These positive working relationships improve and increase satisfaction, perceived congruence, and commitment among school principals. Meanwhile, these relationships also have a positive impact on teachers; Substantive variation is described directly by the relationship mechanism of the principal's desire and expectation to share with his teachers.

Another research that supports the findings comes from a systematic review and meta-analysis of the empirical literature on the effect of principal behaviors on student, teacher, and school outcome proved that there is a direct relationship between principal behaviors and student achievement, teacher welfare, teacher teaching practices, and school organizational health (Liebowitz & Porter, 2019). In addition, a study done by Meyer et al (2020) found that principal leadership had a significant indirect effect on teacher collaboration, mediated by the collective efficacy of teachers. Also, they stated principals have responsibility for shaping teachers' work environment to strengthen and support teacher collaboration.

To conclude, the findings of this research complement the results of previous studies mentioned above even this result covers more findings of how principals should behave with teachers as mentioned in the first paragraph of this section. It is also regarded as more objective since the teachers themselves evaluated their principals' leadership performance.

### **Organizational and Building Management**

The teachers' evaluation of principal's leadership performance for organizational and building management indicated that most teachers especially in the middle school perceive that their principals implement effective leadership practices. The principal can fulfill the related indicators such as they plan and conduct faculty meetings that are worthwhile, well organized, and interesting. Also, they can plan, organize, and communicate regarding schedule adjustments and building organization, demonstrate the ability to provide items necessary in conducting the classes, for example, materials and supplies as well as building policies and regulations are written clearly understood.

Dealing with the above findings, Davis et al (2005) stated that successful principals influence school achievement through the implementation of effective organizational practices. Similarly, it was found that there is evidence of a direct relationship between principal behaviors and organizational health (Leitbowitz & Porter, 2019). In contrast, research conducted by Victor (2017) that analyzed the managerial competence of junior high school principals in managing school resources effectively did not find these principals to have the managerial competencies needed in the procurement of school



facilities and teaching materials, complementing the classrooms and offices with the necessary furnishings for effective material resources. Therefore, the researcher recommended that school principals should strive to acquire managerial competence by involving teachers in decision-making, designing pieces of training for teacher professional development, and equipping facilities needed by schools. The principal competence in organization and building management is crucial for effective leadership since it leads to the achievement of school goals. School leaders who have strong management competencies will support the management and optimization of human resources in their schools (Rachmawati et al, 2020)

How important is organizational competence and building management for school principals, according to Tobin (2014) in his research on leadership and management issues to prepare school principals who produced a module for instructors in the development of background knowledge and information to provide leadership, organizational and management skills for prospective managers education to begin developing personal approaches to organizational behavior. Tobin examined 20 management and leadership issues that should be understood by principal candidates and the findings of this study are included in it. Inevitably, principals should have leadership qualities in building management and organization to be successful in leading schools.

#### **Student Relationships**

Among the leadership evaluation components evaluated by teachers, the student relationship is the most performing good of the principals to do. Indicators of good students relationship such as principal are accessible to students, knows how to communicate with students, viewed by students is being fair, students can talk with him and he will listen, principal uses positive reinforcement as well as punishment with students, and effective and fair in handling student discipline, all indicators were fulfilled by the school leaders in the middle school as well as elementary school.

School leaders play the most important role in ensuring a positive and productive environment for teaching and learning in schools. The principal-student relationship is believed as one of the decisive aspects in the success of students in learning. current educational policy developments hold further hope for school leaders to improve ineffective school climates, teaching and learning practices, and student achievement (Liebowitz& Porter, 2019) Among principal leadership issues that have been investigated, handling student discipline, providing adequate student supervision, managing issues of access to students and student records (Tobin, 2014) are considered as continual problems that the school leaders should pay more attention to. This study proved that the majority of teachers in three levels of

investigated schools perceived their principals to show effective leadership performance related to principal-student relationships.

### **Curriculum and Program Development**

The principal of the middle school fulfilled this school leader evaluation component that was evaluated by teachers. All indicators belong to this competence are effectively done by the principal. The indicators include providing adequate leadership to staff/teachers in developing and understanding philosophy and objectives, building an adequate schedule that accommodates all curricular areas and student needs, encouraging staff/teachers to improve curriculum content, fostering and supporting change as well as supporting innovation at the building and system levels.

Handling curriculum and program development are some of the competencies that should be mastered by school leaders. According to Trakselys et al (2016), school leadership becomes a recent priority of education policy. As many countries are adapting their educational system to the contemporary needs rapidly evolving society, the expectations for schools and school leaders are also changing. Leithwood & Riehl (2003) asserted that principals must nurture their schools through the challenges posed by an increasingly complex environment. So it's not surprising that many of the principal's duties seem a bit redundant. To perform all of these tasks, a school leader may decide to start by identifying what tasks are most important to do (Tobin, 2014). School leaders face conditions that make school life more challenging and their leadership more meaningful. Among these challenges are curriculum standards, achievement benchmarks, pragmatic requirements, and other policies drawn directly from multiple sources that result in complex and unpredictable school requirements. Also, principals must manage new models of collaboration with other social organizations, and rapid changes in technology and communication require adjustments in the school's internal work (Leithwood&Riehl, 2003).

Another issue dealing with this principal competence is educational reform. To lead changes at schools, many researchers agree that school principals are crucial for school success and sustainable educational reform, and there is an urgent need for principals who demonstrate key attributes and qualities of professionalism (Trakselys et al, 2016). Kin and Kareem (2013) said that educational reform is a top priority for many countries. Schools as places for implementing education experience pressure from internal and external changes that cannot be avoided. Even though, most education reforms in the world have not been completely successful because of the absence of leadership for the change as many researchers stated (Kin and Kareem, 2013). Another focus of this principal leadership competence is the ability to encourage teachers to

improve curriculum content and build an adequate schedule that accommodates all curricular areas and student needs. Alsubaie (2016) researched teacher involvement in curriculum development. The study found that there are four issues related to teacher involvement in curriculum development. First, the importance of teacher involvement in curriculum development; second, the challenges faced by teachers in curriculum development; third, the provision of teacher involvement in curriculum development; and fourth, the teacher's role in curriculum development. It is undeniable that in implementing the curriculum, the teacher is the main figure. The teacher is at the center of all curriculum development efforts. Teachers support learning because they are seen as the most knowledgeable about learning practices and are responsible for introducing and explaining the curriculum to their students in the classroom. In addition, the teacher is a part of the environment that affects the curriculum. Hence, teacher involvement in curriculum development is important.

Nevertheless, the challenge that teachers must face in curriculum development is that their involvement in the curriculum development process is very important in adapting the developed curriculum to the needs of the community, while most teachers do not have the qualifications and skills needed to participate in the curriculum development (Ramparsed, 2000). Therefore, professional development for teachers is an important factor that contributes to the successful development and implementation of curriculum (Handler, 2010). Then, professional development becomes a part of the preparation program for teachers to be able to involve in curriculum development (Alsubaie, 2016). So, it is clear that the involvement of teachers in curriculum organization has many roles and responsibilities. Teachers hope to enjoy teaching and learning activities and see their students develop their talents, interests, and skills in areas that each student is interested in. Teachers may need to develop lesson plans or syllabi within the framework of a given curriculum because it is the teacher's responsibility to implement a curriculum that fits the student's needs (Carl, 2009). In short, all issues that have been discussed are almost impossible to be realized without the leadership roles and competencies of school leaders.

### **Community and Parent Relation**

Most teachers in the middle school, as well as the elementary school, evaluated that their principals have effective leadership performance in the component of community and parent relation. The fulfilled indicators cover knowing and functioning effectively within the power structure of school cluster/district and community, communicating well with parents as individuals or groups, knowing when and how to involve parents in the life of the school, also, understanding and having empathy with the social-economic-ethnic character of the community.

Management and leadership issues that were proposed by Tobin (2014) through his research revealed that school leaders should be able to work effectively with parent groups as well as plan and organizing meaningful open houses and teacher and parent meetings. In working effectively with parent groups, there are some potential things to be considered include issues that make a positive contribution to the cooperative relationship of parents, community, and schools; effective strategies in promoting cooperation, open and effective communication, and adopting common goals; district policies and procedures that affect the relationship between schools and similar organizations. This is related to the use of buildings, access to information, use of school equipment, funding of school projects, celebrations at school or other resources; and the way principals manage excessive parental involvement.

Meanwhile, dealing with planning for and making open house and teacher-parent conferences meaningful, there should be some potential issues to be paid attention to by the principals include the objectives of open house and teacher-parent conferences. The objectives should be clear to both teachers and parents, kinds of preparation of such program, also, the activities that have been proven successful; kinds of in-service training are offered to faculty about parent-teacher conference activities; and the students' involved in an open house and teacher-parent conference as well as concerning the available time and materials are made available and suitable with the time allocation (Tobin, 2014). Community and school partnerships have become a promising way to help struggling students, families, and communities. A study conducted by Stefanski et al (2016) showed that partnerships between schools and communities support student learning, school improvement, and strengthen families and communities. In modern times, local schools are generally seen as central institutions of society (in Dewey as quoted by Stefanski et al, 2016). The school provides services as a place where community members can join in and listen to lectures, debate on citizenship issues, and use school facilities for events in the evenings, on weekends, and during school holidays. The roles of family/parent in school community partnership have been investigated. Researchers found four partnership models. Their literature analysis shows that the roles of parents and families are very different across the four models because these roles can guide policies and practices that strengthen the role of families in school-community partnerships (stefanski et al, 2016). Furthermore, Donmez et al (2010) said that the trust of school leaders in parents of students is very important. Principals have a special responsibility to promote trust in all members of the school community as a lack of trust between schools and parents can make it difficult for all parties involved to maintain a genuine dialogue on shared issues. Anyway, education responsibility

needs the involvement of not only schools but also parents and communities, so that, the issue of community and parent relations should also be a priority to be performed through leadership practices by principals as school leaders.

## CONCLUSION

This study aimed at examining how teachers evaluate their principal's leadership in terms of principal-staff relation, organization, and building management, student relationship, curriculum and program development, community, and parent relation as well as to compare the principal leadership in schooling practices of different levels of school. Generally, the results of teachers' evaluation of their principals' leadership performance indicated that the majority of teachers in the three levels of schooling evaluated their principals have effective leadership performance. Even though The teachers of middle school agree that their principal has leadership competencies in five aspects of evaluation, but a half number of teachers in the elementary school said that their principal performs better only on the three aspects of evaluation. Specifically, the principal of elementary schools effectively performs in principal-staff relations, students' relationships, and community and parent relations. Meanwhile, the principal middle school shows effective performance not only in the above three-mentioned aspects but also in organization and building management as well as curriculum and program development.

However, this study just presents a little comparison of the results of the evaluation from the two levels of schooling as described in the findings of this study but did not deeply discuss what are the reasons and how is the difference exists between the schools. It seems to be a limitation of this study that could be a guide for further researchers to investigate. It also recommends that school leader evaluation by teachers should be periodically conducted at schools since the result of the evaluation will provide contributions for principals as school leaders about what to be improved from their leadership competencies and practices and how to do the improvement.

It is also important to say our final comment that although this study uses a leadership evaluation tool suggested by Gorton in 1976, this tool is still effectively used because the indicators contained in it are still relevant to today's conditions regarding the components of the principal's leadership performance. The five aspects of principals' leadership performance evaluated by teachers are aspects that always become issues in assessing the competence of principals, both in leading changes at schools and principals' efforts to make their schools effective.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We would like to address our gratitude to our colleagues at the Educational Management Study Program of Graduate School in the State University of Malang that made this research possible. Thank you for all the assistances especially during the data collection period before the outbreak of COVID 19.

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