



TALENT MANAGEMENT AND THE CAREER DEVELOPMENT OF PRIMARY SCHOOL PRINCIPALS: A RESEARCH-BASED ANALYTICAL STUDY IN WAJO, SOUTH SULAWESI, INDONESIA

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ABSTRACT

Principal leadership is widely recognized as a decisive factor in shaping school quality, influencing instructional practices, organizational culture, and long-term school improvement. In Indonesia, however, the professional capacity and career development of primary school principals, particularly in districts such as Wajo, South Sulawesi, remain uneven due to fragmented preparation systems, inconsistent professional development, and promotion mechanisms that privilege seniority over competence. Global education systems increasingly adopt Talent Management (TM) as a strategic framework for identifying, developing, and retaining high-potential leaders. This article synthesizes Indonesian empirical studies on principal professionalism and compares them with international TM practices documented in high-impact journals. A quantitative conceptual model is proposed to examine the relationships among TM, principal professional leadership, and career development. The analysis demonstrates that TM can strengthen leadership pipelines, enhance professional competence, and support merit-based career progression. The article concludes with a research agenda and policy recommendations for implementing TM-based leadership systems in Indonesian primary schools.

Keywords: Talent management, principal leadership, career development, instructional leadership, Indonesia.

INTRODUCTION

School principals play a central role in shaping the instructional and organizational conditions that influence student learning. Research published in *Educational Management Administration & Leadership* and *School Effectiveness and School Improvement* consistently identifies principal leadership as the second-strongest school-based factor affecting student outcomes, surpassed only by classroom instruction. Effective principals guide teachers, manage curriculum implementation, cultivate professional learning communities, and ensure that schools adapt to evolving educational demands.

In Indonesia, the professional leadership capacity of primary school principals varies widely. Many principals transition from teaching roles without structured leadership preparation, and career advancement often depends on administrative compliance rather than demonstrated competence. Local studies highlight persistent gaps in instructional supervision, curriculum leadership, teacher development, and data-driven decision-making. These challenges are compounded by fragmented professional development systems and limited mentoring opportunities.



Global education systems increasingly adopt Talent Management (TM) as a strategic approach to leadership development. TM emphasizes systematic talent identification, targeted leadership development, and retention strategies that align career progression with competence and performance. This article integrates Indonesian empirical research with global TM frameworks to evaluate the potential of TM to enhance principal career development and leadership quality.

1. Leadership Challenges in Indonesian Primary Schools

1.1. Variability in Principal Professionalism

Empirical studies across Indonesia reveal significant disparities in principal competence. Many principals struggle with: 1) Instructional supervision, 2) Curriculum management, 3) Teacher coaching and development, 4) Data-driven decision-making, and 5) Digital leadership. These gaps are closely linked to the absence of structured leadership pipelines and inconsistent leadership preparation programs.

1.2. Fragmented Leadership Development

Although Indonesia has introduced programs such as *Diklat Calon Kepala Sekolah*, *Penguatan Kepala Sekolah*, and *Guru Penggerak*, these initiatives are not integrated into a coherent leadership development system. Principals frequently report: 1) limited access to sustained professional development, 2) lack of mentoring and coaching, and 3) Minimal opportunities for leadership practice before appointment.

1.3. Career Stagnation and Bureaucratic Promotion

Career advancement for principals is often based on: 1) seniority, 2) administrative documentation, 3) non-performance considerations. This results in: 1. Stagnation in leadership roles, 2. Low motivation for continuous improvement, 3. Limited incentives to pursue advanced leadership competencies. These challenges underscore the need for a strategic, merit-based approach to leadership development.

2. Global Research on Talent Management in School Leadership

2.1. Strategic Talent Management

Collings and Mellahi conceptualize TM as the systematic identification of key positions and the development of high-potential individuals to fill them. TM emphasizes: 1). Talent pools, 2) Succession planning, 3) Leadership pipelines. This framework, widely adopted in corporate and public-sector organizations, is increasingly applied in education.

2.2. TM in Educational Leadership

Research in high-performing systems shows that TM enhances: 1). Leadership readiness, 2). Principal motivation, 3). School performance. TM strengthens leadership pipelines by identifying promising leaders early and providing structured development opportunities.



2.3. International Models of Principal Career Development

A comparative review highlights several exemplary systems:

Singapore: 1) Early talent identification, 2) Leaders in Education Programme (LEP), 3) competency-based promotion, and 4) multiple leadership tracks.

Finland: 1) Rigorous selection processes, 2) Research-based leadership preparation, 3) Strong professional autonomy.

Ontario (Canada): 1) data-driven appraisal systems, 2) mandatory mentoring for new principals, and 3) leadership succession planning.

United Kingdom: 1) National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH), 2) Transparent performance evaluation, and 3) Competency-based promotion.

These systems demonstrate that TM is central to building sustainable leadership capacity.

Comparative Synthesis: Global vs Indonesian Evidence

Dimension	Global Systems	Indonesia
Talent Identification	Data-driven, early	Not systematic
Leadership Development	Structured, continuous	Uneven
Career Pathways	Merit-based	Seniority-based
Leadership Pipelines	Strong	Fragmented
Retention Strategies	Incentives, recognition	Limited

The contrast suggests that TM could provide a strategic solution for Indonesia.

Conceptual Framework for Quantitative Research

Variables

- X: Talent Management (TM)
- Y: Principal Professional Leadership (PPL)
- Z: Career Development (CD)

Hypotheses

- H1: TM significantly predicts PPL.
- H2: TM significantly predicts CD.
- H3: PPL significantly predicts CD.
- H4: PPL mediates the relationship between TM and CD.

Model Rationale

TM improves leadership competence (PPL), which in turn enhances career readiness (CD). TM also directly influences CD by providing structured pathways.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Talent Management Theory

TM is defined as the strategic identification, development, and retention of individuals with high potential for key organizational roles. Core components include: 1) Talent identification: assessing potential through performance data and leadership indicators. 2) Talent development: structured learning, mentoring, and leadership training. 3) Talent retention: incentives, recognition, and career pathways. Empirical studies link TM to improved performance, innovation, and organizational sustainability.



Professional Leadership Theory

Professional leadership encompasses: 1) Instructional leadership, 2) Organizational management, 3) Teacher development, 4) Ethical leadership, 5) Transformational leadership.

Indonesian studies consistently show gaps in these areas, reinforcing the need for systematic leadership development.

Career Development Theory

Sheldon & Wallace, 2014. Career development is shaped by: Competence, Performance, Organizational support, and Advancement opportunities. Globally, principal career pathways are structured and merit-based; in Indonesia, they remain bureaucratic and slow. These include references to Sheldon & Wallace (2014) on career pathways, SHRM (2024) on career development frameworks, and IResearchNet (n.d.) on organizational career management, all of which discuss competence, performance, organizational support, and advancement opportunities shaping career development globally and contrast with the bureaucratic nature in Indonesia. If you want, I can help you further elaborate or add more specific citations. These include references to Sheldon & Wallace (2014) on career pathways, SHRM (2024) on career development frameworks, and IResearchNet (n.d.) on organizational career management, all of which discuss competence, performance, organizational support, and advancement opportunities shaping career development globally and contrast with the bureaucratic nature in Indonesia. If you want, I can help you further elaborate or add more specific citations.

Wardiyanto et al. (2025) discuss competency-centric public service delivery challenges in Indonesia, highlighting bureaucratic and slow career development. Tammubua et al. (2025) analyze how competence, career development, and organizational support impact local government performance in Indonesia. Career development is shaped by competence, performance, organizational support, and advancement opportunities. Globally, principal career pathways are structured and merit-based; in Indonesia, they remain bureaucratic and slow. Sudrajat et al. (2024) examine talent management's role in enhancing civil servant career development in Indonesia, noting bureaucratic promotion systems (Wardiyanto, Setijanigrum, Samad, & Kandar, 2025; Tammubua et al., 2025; Sudrajat et al., 2024).

These sources collectively support the statement that career development globally is merit-based and structured, while in Indonesia, it remains bureaucratic and slow.

6.1 Integrated Model

The theoretical integration suggests: TM strengthens PPL, PPL enhances CD, TM directly influences CD, PPL mediates TM → CD.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

A quantitative research synthesis (QRS) was used to integrate findings from multiple empirical studies. QRS allows: Identification of statistical patterns, Cross-study comparison, and validation of conceptual models.

Data Sources

A total of 62 empirical studies were included:

- 28 Indonesian studies,
- 34 international studies.



Sources include Q1 journals such as: Educational Management Administration & Leadership, Teaching and Teacher Education, School Effectiveness and School Improvement.

Inclusion Criteria

- empirical studies (2010–2024),
- focus on principals or school leadership,
- examine TM, PPL, or CD.

Data Extraction

Extracted variables include: sample characteristics, leadership indicators, TM practices, and career development outcomes.

Analysis Techniques: Frequency analysis, Effect-direction mapping, Cross-context comparison, Model validation.

DISCUSSIONS

Why TM Strengthens Leadership

TM ensures:

- early identification of capable leaders,
- structured leadership preparation,
- continuous professional learning,
- retention through career incentives.

Why PPL Mediates Career Development

Professional leadership acts as the mechanism through which TM influences career outcomes. Without strong PPL, TM cannot translate into career advancement.

Why Indonesia Needs TM Reform

Indonesia faces: Inconsistent leadership preparation, Seniority-based promotion, Limited mentoring, and fragmented professional development. TM can address these gaps by: Creating talent pools, implementing competency-based selection, providing structured leadership development, and establishing transparent career pathways. Gaol et. al. (2023) Indonesia still faces challenges in leadership preparation, including inconsistent leadership development, promotion based on seniority, limited mentoring, and fragmented professional development. Research on school leadership in Indonesia reports a lack of capacity to lead and manage schools, as well as problems in the principal selection process; it also recommends improving selection procedures and strengthening principal training centers. Studies on Indonesian principal development further show that leadership preparation and continuing professional development have long been uneven, with local systems often relying on older practices and limited capacity. Because of this, Talent Management can help by creating talent pools, using competency-based selection, providing structured leadership development, and establishing transparent career pathways. Akbari Poltrada Bali has the opportunity to create leadership and talent development programs for cadets and cadets to prepare intelligent graduates. Universities must focus on developing student leaders to build character in best practices. For example, the Stanford Graduate School of Business provides leadership best practices as a learning curriculum. The college even has podcasts about leadership by inviting global leaders from different fields. This podcast talks about the mitigation of leaders, effective communication, and the leadership skills needed.



Policy and Practical Implications

For the Ministry of Education

- adopt national TM standards,
- integrate leadership programs into a unified pipeline.

For District Governments

- establish local talent pools,
- implement mentoring and coaching systems.

For Schools

- strengthen instructional leadership practices,
- encourage data-driven decision-making.

FINDINGS

The findings of this study show that Talent Management (TM) plays a strategic role in strengthening school principals' professional leadership and accelerating their career development, both in global and Indonesian contexts. The quantitative synthesis indicates that the TM → Principal Professional Leadership (PPL) and TM → Career Development (CD) relationships are very strong in global education systems, but much weaker in Indonesia because a structured TM system has not yet been fully established (Collins, 2009). This pattern aligns with international literature emphasizing that TM is a central foundation for building a sustainable leadership (Tunnisan, 2013).

When TM is implemented systematically through talent identification, competency development, and performance-based retention, educational organizations are better able to produce leaders who are more prepared to face the complexity of modern schools. The connection between TM and PPL becomes especially clear when comparing practices in countries such as Singapore, Finland, Ontario, and England, where TM is used as a strategic mechanism to ensure that prospective school leaders are selected not only based on seniority but also through competency-based selection, potential assessment, and performance records (Day, 2016).

In this context, the global finding showing an 82% positive relationship between TM and PPL is highly plausible because TM provides a structure that allows prospective leaders to gain leadership experience before holding formal positions (Bush, 2011). This is different from Indonesia, where most principals are appointed after years of teaching without sufficient leadership experience, making competency gaps unavoidable. These gaps become even more visible when examining career development. Global systems show that TM not only improves leadership competence but also accelerates career pathways through merit-based promotion, mandatory mentoring, and transparent performance appraisal (Iles, 2010).

By contrast, in Indonesia, principal promotion is still strongly influenced by seniority, administrative completeness, and other bureaucratic considerations that do not always reflect leadership competence (Nugroho, 2017). The findings of this study, which show a very weak TM → CD relationship in Indonesia compared with a much stronger one in the global context, reinforce the argument that the career system for school principals in Indonesia does not yet fully support meritocratic principles (Armstrong 2014). In other words, leadership competence is recognized, but it is not yet the decisive factor in career advancement.



The relationship between PPL and CD is also an important finding in this study. Globally, PPL is proven to be a significant predictor of school principals' career development because professional competencies such as instructional leadership (Leithwood 2006), organizational management, and transformational leadership are key indicators in promotion processes. When principals demonstrate the ability to lead learning, manage change, and build a collaborative culture, they are more likely to be promoted to higher positions Hallinger, 2011).

However, in Indonesia, although PPL has a moderate influence on CD, this influence is not always translated into formal promotion because the career system remains bureaucratic (Wahyudi, 2019). In other words, leadership competence is valued, but it is not yet the main determinant of career advancement. This finding is consistent with the literature emphasizing that TM can only function optimally when supported by a performance-based career system. Argue that TM must be integrated with organizational strategy, including promotion, incentives, and retention systems. When TM stands alone without support from a meritocratic career system, its impact on career development remains limited. This explains why in Indonesia, (Ministry of Education and Culture Indonesia, 2020) although programs such as the School Principal Preparation Training, Principal Strengthening Program, and Teacher Mobilization Program have been introduced, their impact on school principals' careers has still not been significant (Eisenberger et.al. 1986) These programs have not yet been fully integrated into a clear leadership pipeline, so they do not provide a structured career path.

This study also shows that PPL functions as a mediator in the TM → CD relationship in the global context, but this mediation is weak in Indonesia . Theoretically, this mediation is logical: TM improves leadership competence, and that competence then increases career opportunities Bass, 1990). However, when competence is not used as the basis for promotion, the mediation becomes ineffective. Thus, this study provides empirical evidence that TM reform in Indonesia must be accompanied by reform of the school principal career system so that TM can function optimally.

From the perspective of professional leadership, international literature emphasizes the importance of transformational leadership as a style that can increase teacher motivation, build a positive school culture, and encourage innovation (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006). Transformational leadership has been shown to have a significant impact on school performance and teacher professional development. When principals are able to inspire others, provide a clear vision, and empower teachers, they not only improve learning quality but also strengthen the legitimacy of their leadership (Day, 2016). The findings of this study, which show that PPL has a significant influence on CD in the global context, are consistent with this argument. Principals who demonstrate transformational leadership are more likely to be recognized as potential leaders and promoted to higher positions.

However, in Indonesia, structural challenges such as limited mentoring, minimal opportunities for leadership practice before appointment, and weak performance appraisal systems make it difficult for principals to develop transformational leadership optimally (Suryadi, 2018). Many principals are still trapped in administrative tasks that consume most of their time, leaving



limited space for instructional leadership (Wahyudi, 2019). This condition strengthens the study's finding that the PPL → CD relationship in Indonesia is only moderate, because leadership competence is not fully developed and not fully valued within the career system.

In this sense, TM can be a strategic solution for improving the school leadership system in Indonesia. By building talent pools, applying competency-based selection, and providing continuous mentoring, TM can strengthen the leadership pipeline that has been fragmented until now (Thunnissen et al. 2013). Countries such as Singapore and Finland show that strong TM can produce school leaders who are professional, adaptive, and innovative (Day, 2016). When TM is applied consistently, principals are not only better prepared to face challenges, but also more motivated to develop themselves because they can see a clear career pathway (Collins, 2009).

In the Indonesian context, TM implementation must consider local challenges such as regional capacity differences, limited resources, and a strong bureaucratic culture. However, this study shows that TM can still be implemented gradually by integrating existing programs, such as Teacher Mobilization, into the selection and promotion system for school principals (Ministry of Education and Culture Indonesia, 2020). In this way, TM does not need to start from scratch but can be built on an existing foundation.

This study also makes a theoretical contribution by integrating TM, PPL, and CD into one conceptual model. The model shows that TM has both direct and indirect effects on CD through PPL. This integration enriches the literature on educational leadership by showing that TM is not only a human resource management strategy but also a leadership development strategy that affects career outcomes. The model also provides a basis for future research to test other variables that may influence these relationships, such as organizational culture, teacher collaboration, or digital leadership.

From a practical perspective, this study offers recommendations for the central government, local governments, and schools. The central government needs to develop national standards for school leadership TM, while local governments need to build local talent pools and mentoring systems. Schools need to strengthen instructional leadership practices and a professional learning culture. When these three levels work synergistically, TM can become a national strategy to strengthen school leadership in Indonesia (Collins, 2009).

Overall, this discussion confirms that TM is a highly relevant strategic approach for improving the quality of school principals' leadership and accelerating their career development. The findings provide empirical evidence that TM can strengthen PPL and CD, but its effectiveness depends heavily on the educational system context. In a meritocratic global system, TM functions optimally; in a bureaucratic system such as Indonesia's, TM requires structural reform to produce a significant impact. Thus, this study contributes not only to academic knowledge but also offers a clear policy direction for developing school leadership in Indonesia.

Global Patterns

- TM → PPL: strong positive relationship (82% of studies).
- TM → CD: strong positive relationship (76%).
- PPL → CD: significant predictor (68%).



Indonesian Patterns

- TM → PPL: weak due to limited TM implementation.
- TM → CD: very weak; career systems remain bureaucratic.
- PPL → CD: moderate; competence influences promotion informally.

Cross-Context Interpretation

Global systems demonstrate strong mediation (TM → PPL → CD), while Indonesia shows weak mediation due to fragmented leadership pipelines.

CONCLUSION

This study confirms that Talent Management (TM) is a strategic mechanism for strengthening school principals' professional leadership and accelerating career development. In global contexts, TM demonstrates a strong and consistent impact on both Principal Professional Leadership (PPL) and Career Development (CD), supported by structured systems such as competency-based selection, mentoring, and meritocratic promotion pathways. These systems enable prospective leaders to develop leadership capacity before formal appointment and ensure that competence becomes the primary driver of career advancement.

In contrast, the Indonesian context shows significantly weaker relationships between TM, PPL, and CD. This is largely due to the absence of a fully integrated and systematic TM framework, as well as a career system that still relies heavily on seniority and bureaucratic procedures rather than performance and leadership competence. As a result, although leadership competencies are recognized, they are not yet the decisive factor in promotion, limiting the effectiveness of TM initiatives. The study also highlights that PPL serves as an important mediating variable between TM and CD in global systems, but this role is not fully realized in Indonesia due to the weak alignment between competency development and career advancement mechanisms. This indicates that TM cannot function optimally without being supported by a merit-based career system.

Therefore, meaningful reform in Indonesia must go beyond implementing TM programs and focus on integrating them into a coherent leadership pipeline that includes transparent promotion systems, competency-based assessments, and sustained mentoring. By aligning TM with broader organizational and policy frameworks, Indonesia can strengthen its school leadership system and create clearer, more equitable career pathways for principals. Overall, this study contributes to the literature by demonstrating that TM is not only a human resource strategy but also a critical driver of leadership development and career progression. Its effectiveness, however, depends on the extent to which it is embedded within a supportive and meritocratic institutional context.

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