

# Exploring the roles of Special Schools' principals in Student quality improvement: A case study of Special Schools

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## ABSTRACT

This qualitative research aimed to explore the principal's role in improving the quality of students at the Southwest Aceh public special school. In particular, this study discusses the role of school principals as educators, managers, administrators, supervisors, leaders, innovators, and motivators in improving student quality with the main research question what is the role of school principals in improving student quality? This research was conducted using a case study design. Data was collected through in-depth interviews with school principals, supervisors, vice principals, and teachers, as well as observing and reviewing existing documents and literature on the role of the principal. The research findings reveal the school principal's role in improving students' quality, namely that the principal cares about harmonization with students, guides, provides motivation and creates learning programs and skills that can improve student quality. In addition, the results of this study also found that the school principal also administered the data of tipped students and provided rewards and punishments for students who violated school rules. In addition, the findings of this study also found that there were obstacles to improving student quality, namely the management of students in the teaching and learning process united in one class, not based on disabilities. Students mixed with deaf, mentally retarded, disabled, and autistic students are in one class taught by one class teacher, so the achievement of learning objectives is very difficult to realize, and the teacher is very difficult to handle students. The findings from this study have significant implications for the role of school principals in improving student quality because school principals are the most crucial element in schools for improving student quality. Therefore, this study recommends increasing the role of school principals in improving the quality of students for the benefit of Indonesia as a whole.

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## 1. Introduction

The role of the school is essential for the personal development of students; parents' expectations of the school in the development of their children are very high (Roziqin, 2019). The quality of students is one reality that is still far from what is expected by the community; in other words, school institutions still need to be of higher quality and have been unable to meet community expectations (Mayisela et al., 2022). This is reflected in the low quality of school graduates, expressed in the unemployment of students who have graduated. In fact, in daily reality, it can be seen that the graduates of Indonesian special school students have not been able to live independently to overcome the problems of their daily lives (Supriatna, 2019). Our education still

needs to fully meet society's expectations, marked by the low quality of graduates, incomplete resolution of educational problems, and very low power of saying in the world of work (Mallarangeng & Tuijl, 2004).

The quality of education graduates are different from the needs of the labor market and development, both industry, banking, telecommunications, and other labor market sectors, which tend to challenge the existence of schools (Kızıloğlu, 2021). Even though based on the law of the Republic of Indonesia Number 20 of 2003 concerning the national education system in chapter II, article 3 states that: "Education functions to develop capabilities and form dignified national character and civilization in the framework of educating the nation's life, aiming at developing the potential of students to become human beings who believe in and are devoted to God Almighty, have a noble character, are healthy, knowledgeable, capable, creative, independent and become citizens of a democratic and responsible country." The success of schools in improving the quality of students is very dependent on the school principal's leadership because the principal is the most important element in the school (Baporikar, 2016). Even a school's high and low quality can be distinguished by the school principal's leadership (Ahmad Al-Omari, 2020).

Quality is a dynamic condition related to products, services, people, processes, and the supportive environment (da Costa Miranda & Iriani, 2021). The quality of education that goes well depends on several factors, such as school principals, teachers, students, curriculum and facilities, and infrastructure that includes educational inputs and outputs (Aquino et al., 2021). Input is everything that must be available to support the educational process, both the learning process, the decision-making process, and the monitoring and evaluation process (Yohana, 2021). While Output is school performance which can be measured by its quality, effectiveness, productivity, efficiency, innovation, and work morale. School output is said to be of quality, and the quality of student achievement shows achievement (Dambrauskienė et al., 2022). So the head of the school to create quality improvement for students, needs to identify students' needs, strengths, and weaknesses in preparing program plans for students (Wakit et al., 2022). This aims to satisfy education customers, such as students and the public, in obtaining educational service results (Thibodeau et al., 2010).

The principal in creating an increase in the quality of education by identifying the needs, strengths, and weaknesses of the school and in preparing plans involves the participation of school members and the community by empowering existing resources according to the vision, mission, and values of the school for the success of improving the quality of education (Woods, 2005). Previous research has stated that efforts that school principals can make to improve the quality of students are to make all improvements in all aspects of improving the quality of education (Reid, 2019), planning and preparing activity plans (Brooks & Springer, 2021), coordinating the distribution of learning activities, supervising and evaluating teachers regarding learning activities, and coordinating in carrying out all school activities (Ulfa et al., 2021).

There are three roles for the school principal in developing the quality of education: the school principal as a manager, educator, and motivator (Cahyani et al., 2021). This study seeks to identify the principal's role, such as educator, manager, administrator, supervisor, leader, innovator, and motivator, in improving student quality. The role of the principal referred to here is a series of actions owned by the principal, which the position of the principal must carry out as a leader (Aimah & Purwanto, 2019). An effective school principal usually has a clear vision and is involved in various activities to show his partners the goals and strategies for improving student quality (Aimah & Purwanto, 2019). In carrying out his duties as the formal leader of an educational institution, the principal must at least be able to play the role of educator, manager, administrator, supervisor, leader, innovator, and motivator (De Jong & Den Hartog, 2007).

The role of an educator is to guide all components in the school, including teachers, staff, and students, so that they can work together in carrying out each task assigned to them through their professionalism and capacity (Anwar et al., 2022). Four things need to be instilled by a school principal in carrying out his role as an educator: First, mental, that is, matters relating to the inner attitude and human nature (Roy et al., 2020). Second, morals relate to good and bad teachings regarding actions, attitudes, and obligations. Third, physical matters related to physical condition or body, health, and human appearance outwardly. Fourth artistic, namely, human sensitivity to art and beauty (Wessels & Visagie, 2017).

The role of a manager is someone who does something right in managing existing resources (Schein, 2017). So a school principal must be able to plan and organize and control all programs that have been mutually agreed upon. The principal must have management skills like a manager in an organization. As a manager, the principal must have programs and targets that must be realized during his leadership (Wibowo et al., 2023).

The role of the administrator is to play a role in managing the management of the administrative system in schools so that it is effective and efficient (Ince & Çavus, 2016). Among them is the ability to properly manage all teaching and learning tools with evidence of accurate administrative data and manage student administration, finance, facilities and infrastructure, and mail administration (Raksanakorn & Khumsamart, 2020). As an administrator, the school principal has a close relationship with the effectiveness of administrative management, which is recording, compiling, and documenting all school programs (Aktepebasi et al., 2018). Efforts that school principals can make in improving their performance as administrators in improving the quality of education can be described as follows: management of curriculum administration, management of student administration (Asiyai, 2012), management of personnel administration, management of facilities and infrastructure, management of financial administration, management of public relations administration (Cebeci & Caganaga, 2019).

In the role of a supervisor, the principal must have the skills to research, interview, reflect, and determine which conditions are needed for the progress of learning aimed at improving learning (Noorfaidah et al., 2022). Oversight is determining the necessary conditions to guarantee an educational goal's achievement (Raksanakorn & Khumsamart, 2020). A supervisor must have skills in creating human relations, skills in group processes, skills in leadership, skills in fostering school personnel, and skills in evaluation (Altunbas et al., 2019).

The role of a leader and students' success is inseparable from the role of the principal, who is successful in leading. The role of the principal as a leader is the prime mover of all sources and tools in the school (Pratiwi, 2022). In addition, the principal must also have a big soul and the ability to convince and mobilize other people (school residents) to achieve the targeted school goals (Pratiwi, 2022). So what influences the leader is how he moves his subordinates to be obedient, respectful, loyal, and easy to work with (Prihatiningsih, 2020).

The role of an innovator, school principals must have the right strategy to establish harmonious relationships with the environment, seek new ideas, integrate every activity, set an example to all school education staff, and develop innovative learning models (Komarudin & Shofiyah, 2023). The principal, as an innovator, will be reflected in the way he does his work constructively, creatively, negatively, integratively, rationally, objectively, pragmatically, and exemplary (Suryosubroto, 2010). In addition to setting up a good work environment to encourage good quality students. The role of a motivator can be done by setting the working atmosphere, discipline, encouragement, and rewards effectively (Marno, 2007). As a motivator, the principal must have the right strategy to motivate education staff to carry out their various tasks and functions. This motivation can be grown through effective working arrangements, discipline, encouragement, rewards, and providing various learning resources through existing facilities (Megawati & Hartono, 2020).

Preliminary observations and questions and answers with the school principal at the Southwest Aceh State Extraordinary School on the part of the school principal had several problems in improving the quality of students. One class teacher teaches them; on average, they have five to twelve students in one class. Referring to national education standards in Indonesia, students with special needs in one class are at least one to ten students in one class, and all students with disabilities are not mixed with other disabilities. There is a non-ideal situation that students receive in getting good educational services in the classroom; this occurs because schools need teachers, so students get services that are not optimal from schools (Renandya et al., 2018).

The results of observations in class also found that teachers were very overwhelmed in dealing with students such as deaf students, teachers had to use sign language in teaching, and mentally retarded children needed help in carrying out learning activities as well as autistic children who had

active behavior so teachers had to work hard and be good at seeing their potential. -each student so that it can develop specifically (West & Turner, 2019).

In addition, the school's accreditation status with a value of B is the initial finding in the field; the infrastructure is inadequate, the teacher's resources are still lacking, and the graduate students are still of low quality in the competitive world of work and entering tertiary institutions (Ojonogecha, 2021). If you look at the concept of special schools, they are educational programs provided to meet the needs of children with special needs, namely learning service programs that are set for children with special needs (Leona et al., 2021).

The special education system is carried out specifically and separately from providing education for normal children (Megawaty et al., 2021). The purpose of special schools is to accommodate children with special needs in obtaining educational services according to the needs and uniqueness of individuals who have yet to be accommodated in general education (Depdiknas, 2007). Students with special needs require special materials, equipment, services, and teaching strategies. Special schools are a complex service delivery system in helping individuals reach their full potential.

Seeing the problems above, the principal can play his role in improving the quality of students with the roles he has. The advantage of this research is that it uses an exploratory approach to the role of the principal towards the seven roles of the principal educator, manager, administrator, supervisor, leader, innovator, and motivator (Mayisela et al., 2022).

So that school principals can quickly improve the quality of students, especially students with special needs. The purpose of this research is to explore the principal's role in improving students' quality. In general, this research can contribute to helping solve educational problems because the findings of new knowledge can be used as reference material for improving student quality (Fauzi, 2021). This study will help school principals to understand their role as a leader in schools by offering about the role of school principals in improving the quality of students despite the many obstacles and challenges they receive.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

This theory emphasizes the role of principals in inspiring and motivating their staff, fostering a positive school culture, and promoting student achievement. Here's how you can apply the Transformational Leadership Theory as a theoretical framework for your case study, Transformational Leadership: This theory focuses on how leaders can inspire and motivate their followers to achieve exceptional outcomes (Berkovich, 2016). Special school principals can be seen as transformational leaders who inspire and empower their staff to work towards improving student quality. They provide a clear vision, set high expectations, and encourage innovation and collaboration among teachers and support staff (Turnnidge & Côté, 2018). Individualized Support: Transformational leaders in special schools understand the unique needs of their students and provide individualized support. They recognize the diverse abilities and challenges of students with special needs and work closely with teachers, parents, and support professionals to develop tailored strategies that enhance student learning and well-being (Andersen, 2015).

Building Relationships and Collaboration: Special school principals play a crucial role in fostering positive relationships and collaboration within the school community. They promote a supportive and inclusive environment where all stakeholders, including teachers, parents, and students, actively participate in decision-making processes (Price & Weiss, 2013). This collaborative approach helps identify areas for improvement and enables the implementation of effective interventions. Professional Development: Transformational leaders invest in the professional development of their staff to enhance their skills and knowledge in special education. Principals provide opportunities for continuous learning, encourage participation in workshops, conferences, and relevant training programs, and support teachers in adopting evidence-based practices. By developing their staff's expertise, principals contribute to improving student quality in special schools (Burns, 2022).

Monitoring and Feedback: Transformational leaders emphasize the importance of monitoring student progress and providing constructive feedback to teachers and support staff. They implement

systems for data collection and analysis, use evidence-based practices to assess student performance, and provide timely feedback to help teachers refine their instructional approaches. This data-driven approach enables principals to identify areas of improvement and implement targeted interventions. Advocacy and Resource Allocation: Special school principals act as advocates for their students, ensuring that they receive the necessary resources and support (Moradi Korejan & Shahbazi, 2016).

They collaborate with external stakeholders, such as district administrators, policymakers, and community organizations, to secure funding, advocate for policy changes, and promote awareness about the unique needs of students in special schools (Sharma, 2021). Effective resource allocation and advocacy contribute to improving student quality and creating an inclusive educational environment. By employing the Transformational Leadership Theory as a theoretical framework, you can investigate how special school principals demonstrate these leadership qualities and examine their impact on student quality improvement (Berkovich, 2016). This framework will help provide a comprehensive understanding of the roles and responsibilities of special school principals in promoting student success in special education settings.

**Inspirational Motivation:** Transformational leaders inspire and motivate their followers by creating a compelling vision of the future. They communicate this vision with enthusiasm and passion, helping their team members see the importance and value of their work. By inspiring a sense of purpose, they motivate their followers to go above and beyond their own self-interests. **Individualized Consideration:** Transformational leaders pay individual attention to their followers' needs, strengths, and growth opportunities (Moradi Korejan & Shahbazi, 2016). They act as mentors and coaches, providing support, guidance, and personalized development plans. By valuing and investing in the growth of each follower, they foster a sense of trust and loyalty within the team.

**Intellectual Stimulation:** Transformational leaders challenge the status quo and encourage their followers to think creatively and critically. They promote innovation, open communication, and the exchange of ideas. By stimulating intellectual curiosity and encouraging their team members to question assumptions, they foster a culture of continuous learning and improvement (Schein, 2017). **Idealized Influence:** Transformational leaders lead by example and serve as role models for their followers. They embody the values and behaviors they expect from others, earning the respect and admiration of their team members (Oznacar & Debes, 2020). By demonstrating high ethical standards, integrity, and a strong work ethic, they inspire trust and confidence in their leadership. **Increased Employee Engagement:** Transformational leaders create an engaging work environment by inspiring and empowering their followers. This leads to higher levels of employee satisfaction, motivation, and commitment to organizational goals (Magsi et al., 2018).

**Enhanced Performance:** Transformational leaders elevate the performance of their team members by setting high expectations and providing support (Fikri & Ubaidillah, 2022). They encourage innovation, foster a growth mindset, and create opportunities for their followers to develop new skills and talents. **Improved Organizational Culture:** Transformational leaders promote a positive organizational culture characterized by trust, collaboration, and open communication (Mustaqim et al., 2021). They create a sense of unity and shared purpose, leading to higher levels of teamwork and cooperation. **Successful Change Management:** Transformational leaders are effective change agents. Their ability to inspire and motivate others helps facilitate successful organizational change initiatives, as they guide their followers through the change process and maintain their commitment to the vision. Overall, transformational leadership has been widely recognized as an effective leadership approach in various settings, contributing to the growth and success of individuals, teams, and organizations (Keith & Anderson, 2018).

### 3. Method

This study uses a case study qualitative research method to explore the role of school principals in improving student quality. A case study is an empirical investigation that examines a phenomenon in a real-life context (Saiful Bahri, 2020). This qualitative research uses an exploratory research approach; exploration is a type of initial research from extensive research (Nasution, 2002).

Exploratory research aims to get ideas about the main issues in more detail and develop existing hypotheses (Yusuf et al., 2020). This research was conducted in special schools. The research

samples in this study were extraordinary school principals, school supervisors (Murniati), and school supervisors (PS 1). vice principal (Waka 1) and junior teacher (GR 1). The data collection techniques used are interviews, observations, and documents, including facts and stored data that can be used as a source of data obtained in the field. This research was planned from 2019 to 2022, when researchers went through difficult and different stages because the Covid-19 virus hit the world at the end of 2019. This research also used data analysis techniques that described circulation occurring between data collection, data presentation, data reduction, and conclusions (Miles & Huberman, 2012).

There are four reasons why this case study was chosen. First, this research aims to understand school principals' role in special schools deeply. Second, this study is proposed to meet the criteria that case studies are used to explore in-depth issues of a series of events (Gülbahar & Koşar, 2020). Third, this study is expected to capture real conditions and provide a solid description of the experience of the role of the school principal, such as thoughts about the role, strategy, and policies or decisions toward improving student quality. Fourth, This research was built with qualitative case studies to gather comprehensive information about the role of the school principal.

#### 4. Results and Discussion

The total number of students at the Southwest Aceh public special school is 119 students consisting of five students with disabilities, including three students with visual impairment, 29 students with hearing impairment, 58 students with intellectual disability, nine students with disabilities, and 20 students with autism with the number of students varying at each level.

**Table 1. Number of students by Level**

Number	Level Education	Male	Female	Amount	School level
1	Level 1	7	6	13	Elementary school
2	Level 2	8	6	14	
3	Level 3	6	1	7	
4	Level 4	9	3	12	
5	Level 5	13	1	14	
6	Level 6	3	1	4	
7	Level 7	9	6	15	Junior high school
8	Level 8	5	2	7	
9	Level 9	4	2	6	
10	Level 10	6	5	11	Senior High School
11	Level 11	5	2	7	
12	Level 12	5	4	9	
<b>Amount</b>		80	39	119	

Source : Data for a special school in Southwest Aceh

##### 4.1. The role of the principal in improving the quality of students

The findings of research conducted at the Southwest Aceh public special school show that the role of the principal as an educator creates good relationships with students in the school environment. Communication between school principals and students is the most important thing in all aspects of education services because school principals and students are interrelated in achieving the ultimate goal of the educational service process in schools. In addition, the principal also carries out positive habits in the school environment so that students can make him a good example or role model in student character education, such as: coming to school early, welcoming students, shaking hands with students, picking up trash, dressing neatly and so on. The research findings also found that school principals guide students, constantly reminding them of the importance of education, studying diligently, and participating in activities both within and outside the school environment.

*"I am here; the principal, of course, really hopes that all my students will be successful after graduating from school.. so I always find ways to communicate and interact with good students. Discuss with them, give advice, and motivate them to study hard."*

*Besides that, Murniati also said that; "The most important thing is that I can interact well with students because good relations are important...and set an example including discipline when entering school and behavior or manners...then I develop a student-centered program."*

Based on field observations and interviews, Murniati compiled programs based on student development, such as student-centered or differentiation learning, hydroponic programs, catfish farming, cooking, beauty, hair cutting, and extra-curricular activities in character development.

*"All students are involved in the school program that we make.. students can choose the skills they like based on their disabilities and potential.. the teachers direct which program is suitable for these students. Sometimes mentally retarded students are not suitable for haircuts, so we direct them to plant cultivation or catfish farming...current school programs for students that I do are differentiation learning, hydroponic programs, catfish farming, catering, beauty, and hair cutting... in our catering program There are other sub-activities such as making cranky braids and making ready-to-drink drinks like tea and ice pop."*

Furthermore, Murniati also said: *"Students who are already here now, some have succeeded, some have opened their businesses, and some have also worked for our deaf students. Now he has opened his business selling and opening a car dashboard... he just graduated from school two years ago."*

The role as an educator carried out by the head of the Southwest Aceh public extraordinary school gave good results in the quality of students with evidence that school alums could be independent in the community.

The principal of the Southwest Aceh public special school practiced his role as a manager to improve the quality of students by looking at the potential of the human resources in the school and maximizing the potential possessed by the school. Murniati says: *"I have a way of managing programs that are in favor of students starting from designing, implementing programs and supervising such as learning processes and skill activities in developing student independence."*

Furthermore, Waka 1 stated: *"The principal has good knowledge in managing school activities, besides he makes careful plans, he also makes good reports assisted by staff... all school program documents are well managed in the form of books and school archive files."* (interview with Deputy 1).

The principal, in carrying out his duties and role as a manager in improving the quality of students, has his strategy to empower education staff through collaboration, provide work opportunities, motivate teachers and staff, and also provide awards. *"I, as the school's principal, really appreciate and appreciate the work of the teachers and staff at the school in providing quality educational services to students."*

In the role of an administrator, the principal utilizes various resources such as humans, facilities and infrastructure, and various other learning media optimally, precisely, effectively, and efficiently to support the achievement of educational goals. The principal has the following views;

*"I design short and medium-term school programs, especially for students, such as making teaching programs, preparing class schedules, making provisions for class increases, reporting student learning outcomes... and also planning student learning needs such as books, learning facilities, and media... besides that, I do archive student data and managing it properly."*

Furthermore, Waka 1 stated: *"The school principal manages student data well, starting from the first data entering school to leaving, such as personal data of students and their parents, student diaries from teachers and also data on student learning outcomes."* (interview with representative 1)

Then also, GR 1 states that: *"We are very limited in obtaining complete student data at the start of school, such as student health history data and student development before entering school. As a teacher of students with special needs need this information to make it easier for me to teach in*

class.. for now, we have to carry out a diagnostic assessment to find out students' strengths and weaknesses." (interview with GR 1)

From the several interviews above regarding the role of the school principal as administrator, it can be concluded that the head of the Southwest Aceh special public school, in carrying out his role as administrator, has tried to do his best, such as designing short-term, medium-term programs compiling school schedules, preparing exam schedules and archiving student data. However, some could be more optimal in administering data on medical history and student development before entering school, which teachers need to teach students with special needs.

The principal who acts as a supervisor in improving the quality of students means that the principal has the responsibility to monitor, guide and improve the learning process in the classroom, which must be improved. In this aspect, it means that the principal supervises the teacher and monitors the learning process in the classroom. Murniati said:

*"As a school principal, I must supervise teacher administration and the teaching and learning process in the classroom... and I also monitor all activities carried out in the school that I lead, both students, teachers, staff, and outsiders who do social service or service at this school."*

Then Waka 1 stated: *"I am very often given additional assignments to supervise teachers, both administrative supervision and supervision of the teaching and learning process in the classroom to assist school principals in the teacher supervision program."* (interview with Deputy 1)

From the results of a brief interview with Murniati in carrying out her role as supervisor, she said: *Researcher: How do you carry out the role of the principal as a supervisor? Respondent: I, as the principal of the school, have an obligation to supervise the administration of teaching materials for teachers and class supervision; I always monitor their progress and that of students. Researcher: What do you want to get from supervising? Respondent: I want to monitor the learning process that the teacher applies to students and activities carried out outside the classroom. The goal is to ensure that school programs can be implemented properly. I will evaluate and provide special guidance to teachers and students if there are obstacles. Researcher: What efforts do you make if the school program is constrained?. Respondent: Of course, I will evaluate what has been implemented at school, and then I will look for a solution if there are problems with the teacher regarding his teaching potential. I will make a training program for teachers.*

In carrying out his role as a leader to improve the quality of his students, the Southwest Aceh public special school principal has several strategies that are practiced in realizing common goals that have been targeted to students, including designing pro-student programs, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating. At the program design stage, the principal designs a program that favors students at the beginning of each year.

*"So at the beginning of every year, I gather all school members, teachers, school supervisors, staff, and school committees to hold a work meeting to develop school work programs such as intra-curricular and extra-curricular work programs."*

Waka 1 further stated: *"...at the beginning of every year, we are invited by the school principal to design a school program to be proposed in the school budget plan, and all teachers, staff, parent representatives, and school supervisors are also present."* (interview with Waka 1)."

Then, PS 1 conveys below: *"To design school programs in improving the quality of students, I was also invited to be involved in designing programs that are pro-students together."* (PS 1 interview)

At the program implementation stage, the principal, as the leader of the program's sustainability, also distributes the powers of the head teacher and staff by establishing an activity committee so that the program designed jointly can be adequately realized.

*"In implementing the program... I made a committee as the executor consisting of teachers, staff, and students because, in my opinion, cooperation is important, so we have to involve everyone to make what we design successful; I give additional tasks to teachers and staff at school"*.



Furthermore, GR 1 conveyed: *"We teachers were given tasks and responsibilities other than our main teaching duties, namely given additional tasks to carry out school programs designed jointly. I was given additional tasks managing the clothing sewing skills program."* (interview with GR 1).

In carrying out his role as a leader, the principal distributes his leadership to the teacher as an additional task in implementing the program that has been designed. The results of the researcher's interview with Murniati stated: *"School programs in the field of learning such as compiling semester learning programs, organizing student assessment activities, student study groups I give responsibility to the representative to the school in the curriculum and extra-curricular fields or student development and student skills to the vice principal of student affairs."*

Furthermore, Waka 1 stated: *"In implementing school programs, I am often the chief executive because I was given a position by the principal as vice principal to carry out the activities that we had arranged at the beginning of the year, such as making study programs, making school operational curricula and carrying out school exams and that became My responsibility as deputy principal of the school."* (interview with Deputy 1)

At the program monitoring stage, the principal supervises directly by the principal to ensure that the implemented program is running well. Supervision is used to observe and know the implementation of the lesson plan with its implementation. Murniati says: *"I routinely supervise the program that has been jointly designed by monitoring and supervising in the classroom."*

PS 1 further stated: *"Once a week, I go straight to school to monitor the learning process at school and also make observations in class to make sure the program we make is running well... and also I very often give suggestions or feedback to teachers and school principals to achieve the full school program."* (interview with PS 1).

Then, Murniati stated: *"The instruments that I use in supervising and supervising I socialize to teachers what things I supervise."* At the evaluation stage, the principal sees the realization and implementation of programs that have taken place continuously at school. The results of the researcher's interview with Murniati stated: *"I analyzed the results of the criteria instrument that I used in monitoring activities both in class and the results of observations outside the classroom when the teacher guided students."*

In carrying out his duties as an innovator to improve the quality of students, the Southwest Aceh public special school principal has his strategy for coaching students, dividing tasks and authorities to balanced student coaches not overlapping in carrying out their respective main tasks and functions. *"I have to be good at seeing who deserves me to give additional assignments to foster students and also the teacher's workload so that there is no overlap, so it is not effective."*

PS 1 further says that: *"I see that many school programs are made very attractive and suitable for students with special needs such as curriculum modifications, teaching module modifications, and differentiated learning and also creating individual learning plans, which I did not think of at first because I have a non-special education background."* (interview with PS 1)

Then Murniati said: *"So when students enter, I have designed student mapping by looking at their potential, weaknesses, and what can be developed here. Also, in learning, I adjust the existing curriculum by modifying the curriculum because children with special needs curriculum must adapt to non-student students. That adapts to the curriculum... and I apply differentiated learning in this school because every child is unique and has different learning styles."*

From the several interviews above, the role of the principal as an innovator was very successful and helpful for students in improving student quality. This role is carried out from the start at the time of acceptance of new students by carrying out diagnostic assessments to providing enrichment or remedial learning to students with low learning achievement. The school principal carries out the implementation of curriculum adjustments and curriculum modifications provided by the government so that all students with special needs can be properly accommodated in learning. The curriculum does not apply in general but is specifically designed for the needs of children with special needs, which aims to serve students with special needs. These efforts are made to maintain continuous quality to benefit students and increase public trust in schools.

The principal of the Southwest Aceh special public school, in carrying out his role as a motivator to improve student quality and learning achievement, takes several steps so that student learning achievement and independence can be increased, namely by implementing adjustments to the work environment, giving rewards, and giving punishments. The results of the researcher's interview with Murniati said: *"I encourage all members of the school to be enthusiastic at work, and I also reward students who excel, and for students who are not disciplined, I reward them with sanctions."*

Then, Murniati also conveyed: *"We see that what we apply is very suitable in our school where we give awards for achievements and those who have problems we give punishment and also guidance ... but for now it does not come to being expelled from school; we foster students who have problems well who are assisted by counseling teacher"*.

Furthermore, GR 1 states that: *"The principal is very consistent with the school's code of conduct which is drawn up jointly with the school community. If students violate the rules of procedure, he will give sanctions starting from the smallest things, such as reprimanding and advising to summoning parents to either expel or question the student. go to school again... and also he will give prizes to our students who get achievements at the provincial and national levels."* (interview with GR 1).

Students are entrusted explicitly by their parents to participate in learning held at school to become human beings with knowledge, skills, experience, personality, morals, and independence (Ulfa et al., 2021). According to Suwarno & Bramantyo, (2019), students officially register to study at school. In this case, the student is considered a person, individual, and social creature whose identity must be developed to reach an optimal level (Lin et al., 2020). Therefore, students can be concluded as individuals who register formally and officially in schools to become individuals with the knowledge, skills, and personality to optimize their abilities so that they are helpful for the nation's future. The results of the research findings on the role of school principals in improving the quality of students in Southwest Aceh public special schools were found to include the following:

*The role of an educator*, the principal maintains a harmonious relationship with students, sets an excellent example for students, guides students to achieve success, and compiles programs based on student development, such as: learning to plant or differentiate students, hydroponic programs, catfish farming, catering, beauty, haircuts, and extra-curricular activities in character development. In carrying out his goals as an educator, the Southwest Aceh public special school's principal has carried out the role of students very well by paying attention to the natural and natural nature of the student's time to develop independence and planned learning in students. As a top leader, the principal must be able to make creations and innovations to improve the quality of learning and the quality of service in schools as a whole (Dambrauskienė et al., 2022). In addition, the school guarantees students' moral and character development during the educational process (Keengwe & Bull, 2016). The aim of carrying out the role of an educator, schools can improve the quality of students so that they become independent and have good personalities in the school, family, and community environment (Sapriya, 2005). It has been proven that many alums of the Southwest Aceh public special school can take care of themselves and work in society.

*Role as a manager*, as a manager, the principal must have programs and targets that must be realized during his leadership (Ivana & Islam, 2022). The principal of the Southwest Aceh public special school carried out several strategies in the role of carrying out the manager's role in managing the school program, starting from designing, implementing, and supervising. Apart from that, it also manages all school documents properly in the form of books and school archive files and provides good services to students, such as managing student data. The role of school management that he applied to improve the quality of students is an integral component and must be integrated with the overall educational process (Malpartida Gutiérrez et al., 2021). The principal emphasizes efforts to manage school resources well in implementing school management. There are similarities developed by (Mangold & Faulds, 2009), planning, Organizing, Actuating, and Controlling. As a school principal, he is someone who can influence the behavior of other people in his work by using the power he has (Stanwick & Stanwick, 2020).

*The role of an administrator* found that the principal makes short-term programs or annual programs such as teaching programs, arranges student learning schedules, makes provisions for

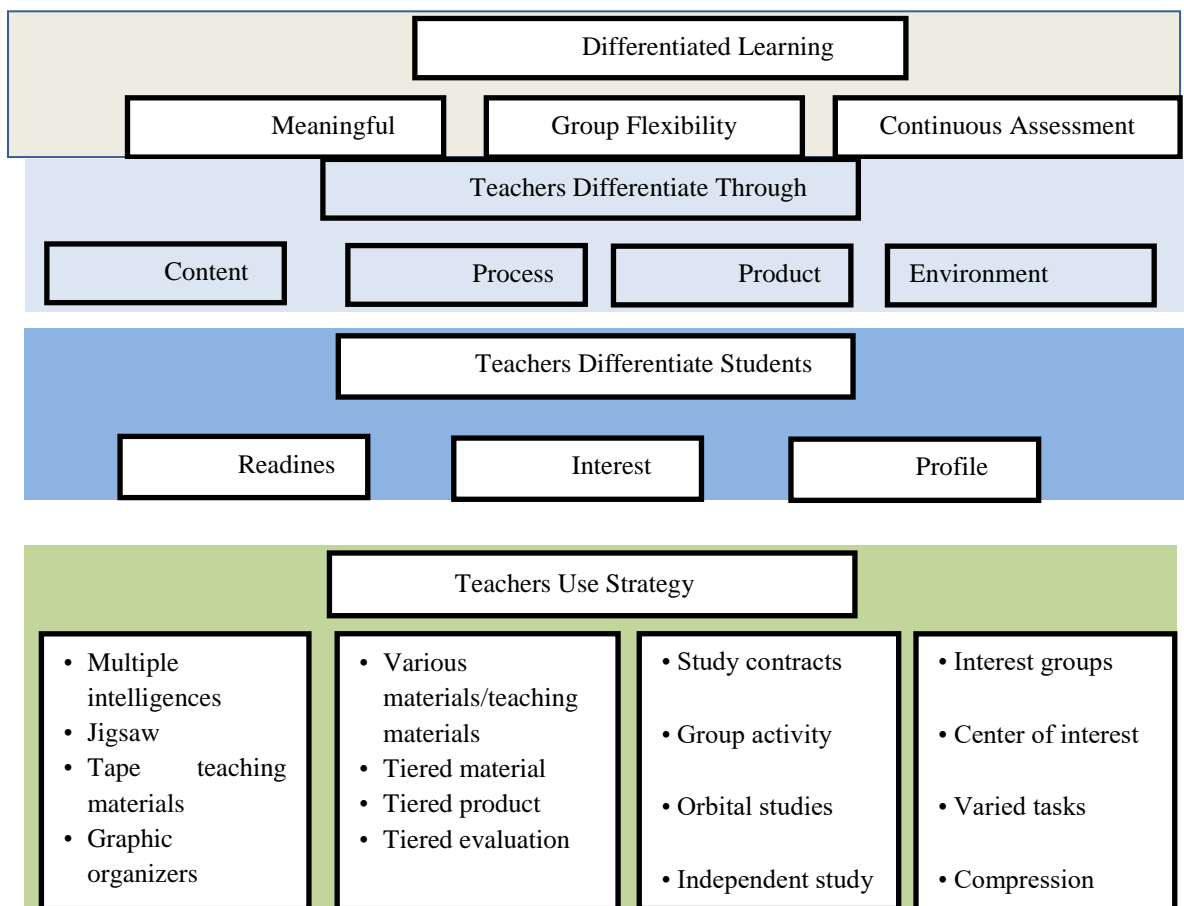
student grade increases, reports student learning outcomes and archives student data, and manages them properly (Purwanto et al., 2020). The four-year medium-term program, such as designing student learning needs such as books, facilities, and infrastructure and designing learning media, must be adjusted to the school's operating budget. According to Aimah & Purwanto (2019), it is easier for schools to move toward the educational and teaching goals they should achieve with good administration and leadership. So therefore, the principal, in carrying out his role as an administrator, needs to carry out effective administrative services, which are an important part that every school must carry out. Without good school administration services, it is very difficult for schools to go to quality schools as administrative management activities that are planning, organizing, coordinating, supervising, staffing, student affairs, evaluation, financing and problem solving, and using or utilizing the facilities available both personnel (Dewi et al., 2023). Therefore, as an administrator, the principal should provide effective administrative services in the school he leads (Usman & Eko Raharjo, 2013).

*The role of a supervisor*, namely the principal, monitors, fosters, and supervises to improve the learning process in the classroom, which must be improved for student improvement. Supervision is a process designed to help teachers use their knowledge and abilities to provide the best service to students (Prihatiningsih, 2020). Supervision can assist school principals in conducting supervision to improve the quality of teachers and students (Irwan & Marsidin, 2020). In the role of superintendent, the school principal can monitor student progress and teacher performance in the learning process inside and outside the classroom to ensure that student quality improvements occur through the school program to create quality schools. The school principal to carry out the role as a supervisor in increasing students effectively requires appropriate monitoring, coaching, and supervision techniques to improve student quality, including 1) class visits, 2) private meetings, 3) student and teacher meetings, 4) utilization model teachers, 6) publishing school bulletins, and 7) interviewing student needs and so on, (Irfan, 2022). The success of school principals in carrying out their role as supervisors can be demonstrated through raising awareness of teachers to improve their performance and increasing the skills of education staff in carrying out their duties.

*In his role as a leader*, the principal has the authority and power and the ability to organize and develop his subordinates professionally by making programs in favor of students, implementing, supervising, and evaluating such as scouting activities and religious activities. As a leader, the principal must be able to mobilize all available resources in the school to improve the quality of students because the principal has the authority and power, and the ability to manage and develop his subordinates professionally (Baporikar, 2016). As a leader, the principal must also be able to realize educational services in schools that are satisfied with the beneficiaries of education, according to (Jumaiyah et al., 2021). The principal must be able to mobilize, motivate and influence people to be willing to take actions directed at achieving goals through the courage to make decisions about activities that must be carried out (Rahardja et al., 2017). So therefore, the principal in carrying out leadership must have a program that is directed and measurable in improving students, such as pro-student programs both in the process of intra-curricular teaching activities and the process of extra-curricular activities such as character education and talent through design, implementation, supervision, evaluation, and follow-up continue the repair (Suparman, 2021).

*The role of an innovator* is to obtain a balanced division of tasks and authority for student mentors without overlapping, continuous improvement of student barriers, adjustment of the curriculum to accommodate student needs, conduct diagnostic assessments, and differentiated learning (Moos, 2021). Efforts made by school principals have yielded tangible results in improving the quality of students in special schools by dividing tasks and responsibilities to student coaches, solving student problems with continuous improvement, identifying initial assessments, and differentiated learning that can accommodate students' needs in learning. Several things underlie the need for education services for children with special needs that are tailored to their individual needs, namely: Children special needs in learning, the more severe the level of disability, the more complex the way of learning it requires modification) Schools are responsible for providing functional skills so that students can be independent; teachers must deal with the parents of students in running the program and evaluating the program, the teacher plays a vital role in achieving learning goals, and children with special needs need educational services with the principles of behavior modification (Naparan & Tulod, 2021). Therefore differentiated learning needs to be implemented. Differentiated

learning is learning that accommodates, serves, and recognizes the diversity of students in learning according to learning readiness, interests, and preferences (Naparan & Tulod, 2021). Concern for students in paying attention to the strengths and needs of students is the focus of attention in differentiation learning. There are four components of differentiated learning: content, process, product, and learning environment.



**Fig. 1.** Differentiated Learning, Vaganova et al., (2020)

*The role of a motivator* is found to provide motivation to students and also for students whose achievements are good are given awards and if students who have problems with good discipline are given sanctions or good punishment starting from warnings, being called by parents to being expelled from school. The findings of previous studies stated that the provision of reward and punishment impacts the level of discipline and student learning motivation if done appropriately and adequately (Anggraini et al., 2022). The reward and punishment method motivates students to be more obedient and orderly to all the rules applied by the school. The school principal must be appropriate in carrying out reward and punishment; the role of the school principal is very influential in the impact that students will receive (Alexandrov et al., 2020). Giving rewards is done by instilling good values, which are carried out by habituation and appreciation when doing positive things. However, when children do negative things, the principal will provide appropriate punishment for students. Punishment is intended so that children do not repeat actions that are not allowed. The principal warns students not to repeat and explains why this is prohibited. However, the most important thing is that the principal must be able to encourage stimulation from within and outside students so that someone wants to make changes in behavior or certain activities better Johnson (2021) because the goal is to encourage someone to take action in achieving a certain goal, both from within himself and from outside himself (Bini & Bellucci, 2020). At the Southwest Aceh public special school, the provision of reward and punishment is used by teachers as a form of reinforcement, a stimulus in educating students.

## 5. Conclusion

In the research findings on the role of school principals in improving school quality in the field of improving student quality, school principals maintain harmonization with students, guide, provide motivation and create learning programs and skills that can improve student quality, such as student-centered learning, literacy, supervision, programs hydroponics, catfish farming, catering, beauty, hair cutting, and apprenticeship programs. In addition, the results of this study also found that the school principal also administered the data of tipped students and provided rewards and punishments for students who violated school rules.

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