

The Role of Principal Leadership in Improving Teacher Performance and Learning Quality in Elementary Schools

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Article Info	ABSTRACT
Article history: Received 13-06- 2025 Approved 26-06- 2025	This study aims to analyze in depth the role of school principals in improving teacher performance and the quality of learning in elementary schools. The main focus of this study is how principals, through the right leadership approach, can create an effective learning environment and empower teachers to achieve high professional standards. This research uses a literature study method, by reviewing various relevant national and international scientific journals, especially those that discuss the topics of educational leadership, teacher performance, and learning quality at the elementary education level. The results of the study show that the application of transformational and instructional leadership styles by school principals has been proven to be able to increase teachers' motivation, dedication, and professional competence. A school principal who is visionary, inspiring, and actively involved in the teacher's academic process encourages the formation of a collaborative work culture and meaningful learning. This finding confirms that the leadership of school principals is not only related to administrative aspects, but also a strategic factor in shaping the quality of education as a whole. Therefore, increasing the leadership capacity of school principals needs to be a priority in efforts to reform and strengthen the quality of basic education in Indonesia. Keywords: Principal's leadership, teacher performance, elementary school

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INTRODUCTION

Basic education is the first and most fundamental phase in the formal education system. At this level, not only basic academic skills are formed, but also character, moral, social, and cultural values that become the foundation for students' success at the next level of education. In this context, the quality of basic education is an important indicator for the success of the education system as a whole. Therefore, improving the quality of basic education must be the main concern in national education policy.

The quality of education at the elementary school level is highly dependent on two main aspects, namely teacher performance and the quality of the learning process. Teachers are

the spearhead in the implementation of the curriculum and the formation of students' character. Meanwhile, the quality of learning reflects the extent to which the educational process is able to accommodate the learning needs of students effectively. To achieve these two things, the role of the principal as an education leader is very crucial. The principal not only acts as an administrator, but also as a learning manager and change agent who is able to move all elements of the school towards continuous improvement.

Effective leadership of school principals is one of the important determinants in creating a productive school climate, encouraging innovation, and facilitating teacher professional development. Contemporary studies show that transformational and instructional leadership models have a positive impact on improving teacher motivation and performance, which in turn affects the quality of learning (Az-Zahra & Suherman, 2024; Mukhlisin et al., 2024). Principals who have a strong vision, are able to build open communication, and empower teachers in decision-making will create a collaborative and supportive work environment.

In the context of the Independent Curriculum that is being implemented nationally, the challenges and demands on school principals are increasing. This curriculum emphasizes character development, differentiated learning, and strengthening 21st century competencies such as critical, creative, collaborative, and communicative thinking. For this reason, school principals are required not only to understand the substance of the curriculum, but also to be able to implement adaptive and innovative leadership approaches so that teachers are able to carry out meaningful learning.

Participatory leadership is also a relevant approach in the context of elementary schools. In this approach, school principals involve teachers and education staff in the decision-making process, program planning, and evaluation of school performance. This creates a high sense of belonging, increases commitment, and strengthens solidarity among members of the school community. Stated that school principals who prioritize collaboration and open dialogue can increase teacher job satisfaction, which ultimately has an impact on improving the quality of learning in the classroom (Nada et al., 2024).

In addition, the principal has a responsibility for the professional development of teachers in an ongoing manner. The provision of systematic training, workshops, and supervision is a form of concrete support to improve the pedagogical, professional, social, and personality competencies of teachers. Targeted development programs will enable teachers to implement innovative, technology-based learning strategies that are tailored to the needs of students. Emphasized the importance of supporting school principals in improving teachers' IT competencies in order to be able to integrate technology in the learning process effectively (Sumarni et al., 2024).

A conducive work environment is also an important factor that can encourage the enthusiasm and dedication of teachers. Principals who are able to create a school culture that is inclusive, safe, and respectful of diversity will foster a sense of comfort and togetherness in the school environment. Stated that a positive work climate plays a role in increasing teachers' loyalty and productivity in carrying out their duties (Wahyudi et al., 2025). Therefore, humanistic and empathetic leadership needs to be put forward in elementary school management.

Academic supervision and teacher performance evaluations that are carried out regularly are also an important part of the principal's duties. Through this activity, school principals can provide constructive feedback, identify teachers' strengths and weaknesses, and develop data-driven improvement strategies. Evaluations that are carried out objectively and transparently will encourage teachers to continue to improve the quality of teaching and learning. Show that supervision carried out collaboratively and reflectively is able to improve

the quality of the teaching and learning process and create a culture of quality in schools (Hidayat et al., 2024).

In the midst of global dynamics and 21st century challenges, the role of school principals as visionary leaders is increasingly important. The world of education is faced with various changes such as digitalization, globalization, and the complexity of social issues that affect school life. School principals are required to not only manage change, but also to be the driving force for innovation in schools. Stated that school principals who are able to facilitate 21st century learning will create a resilient, creative, and highly competitive generation (Zubaedah et al., 2024).

From the perspective of school-based management, school autonomy provides opportunities for principals to develop policies that are contextual and in accordance with local needs. This is a strategic opportunity for school principals to lead changes and improvements in the quality of education at the education unit level. Strengthening the leadership capacity of school principals in decision-making, resource management, and the use of data in planning and evaluation is very important in facing these challenges.

However, the challenges in implementing the leadership of school principals cannot be ignored. Several studies reveal that school principals still face various obstacles such as limited resources, resistance to change from teachers, and high administrative burdens (Ali, 2024). Therefore, support from the government, school supervisors, and the education community is needed to strengthen the role of school principals in carrying out their leadership functions optimally.

This article aims to examine in depth how the leadership role of school principals contributes to improving teacher performance and learning quality in elementary schools. This research was carried out through literature studies from various relevant and current scientific journals. The focus of the study is directed at transformational and instructional leadership practices, teacher professional development strategies, the creation of a conducive work environment, and supervision and evaluation carried out by school principals. Thus, the results of this study are expected to make a theoretical and practical contribution to the development of educational leadership in elementary schools.

Overall, the leadership of the principal is a strategic element in building a quality school. An effective principal is not only able to carry out administrative tasks, but also has the capacity as a learning leader who is able to inspire, motivate, and empower all school residents. In the current era of educational transformation, school principals are required to be agents of change who are able to bring innovation, improve teacher performance, and ensure the achievement of learning quality that meets community expectations.

METHODS

This research uses a qualitative approach with the literature study method (library research). This approach was chosen because it aims to explore and analyze in depth various theories, findings, and practices related to the leadership role of school principals in improving teacher performance and learning quality in elementary schools. Literature studies allow researchers to gain a comprehensive understanding of various scientific perspectives that have been studied and published in reputable journals.

Data was collected from a variety of relevant scientific sources, including national and international journal articles published between 2020 and 2025, in both Indonesian and English. The inclusion criteria include articles that discuss the theme of principal's leadership, teacher professional development, learning quality, and elementary school context. These sources are accessed through databases such as Google Scholar, DOAJ, Sinta, and Scopus-indexed journals.

The analysis procedure is carried out with a thematic approach, namely identifying and grouping the main themes that emerge from the results of the literature study. Each finding is critically examined and compared to find patterns, similarities, and theoretical and practical implications in the context of basic education management.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Transformational and Instructional Leadership

Transformational and instructional leadership are two complementary approaches that have proven to be effective in improving teacher performance and the quality of learning in elementary schools. In practice, transformational leadership is reflected in the ability of the principal to inspire, motivate, and foster a collective spirit among teachers and education staff to achieve the school's shared vision. Principals who adopt this style usually have high integrity, be visionary, and be able to be a moral example for the entire school community. They not only set a clear direction for the development of educational institutions, but also build strong and positive interpersonal relationships with teachers. In this case, the principal plays the role of an agent of change that encourages innovation, creativity, and commitment from teachers to continue to develop. Transformational principals provide trust and wide participation space to teachers in strategic decision-making related to learning, so that teachers feel valued and have a sense of ownership of the school's progress. This approach encourages the growth of intrinsic motivation in teachers to work more optimally, not because of pressure, but because of professional awareness and dedication to students.

Meanwhile, instructional leadership has a more technical focus on improving the quality of learning and achieving student learning outcomes. Principals who carry out instructional roles play an active role in designing, monitoring, and evaluating the learning process in the classroom. They engage directly in academic supervision, conduct classroom observations, provide constructive feedback to teachers, and facilitate professional development activities such as training, workshops, and focus group discussions. Instructional leadership emphasizes the importance of clarity of learning objectives, the use of appropriate pedagogic strategies, and the application of authentic, developmentally oriented assessments. Instructional principals also show concern for the individual learning needs of students and teachers' ability to manage them. They created a systematic monitoring and evaluation system for academic performance, both from the teacher and student side, so that the quality improvement process can be carried out in a measurable and sustainable manner.

The combination of transformational and instructional leadership creates a strong synergy in driving change and overall school quality improvement. Principals who are able to integrate the two will form a school ecosystem that is not only inspiring but also professional and accountable. With transformational, principals build psychological and cultural foundations through values, motivation, and collective spirit, while with instructional, they reinforce the technical and academic dimensions of the learning process. In this context, teachers are not only the technical implementers of the curriculum, but also the actors of change involved in the preparation of educational visions, program planning, and reflection on student learning outcomes. Recent studies have shown that teachers who feel inspired by their principals have higher work motivation, are more open to innovation, and show more consistent performance and have a significant impact on improving student learning outcomes (Az-zahra & Suherman, 2024; Hidayat et al., 2024).

In addition, this combined leadership style has proven adaptive in dealing with various challenges of 21st century education, including curriculum changes, technological integration, and complex social dynamics in elementary school environments. Transformational-

instructional principals are better equipped to facilitate educational transitions and reforms because they are able to emotionally embrace teachers while guiding them professionally. They balance between roles as motivators and as academic supervisors. In the context of the implementation of the Independent Curriculum, for example, school principals in this style are able to facilitate teachers' understanding of the curriculum philosophy, as well as provide technical support in the implementation of differentiated learning and formative assessment. This has an impact on improving the quality of learning that is more contextual, meaningful, and in accordance with the needs of students.

Empirically, many studies show that schools led with transformational and instructional leadership styles show significant improvements in various quality indicators, such as teacher job satisfaction, team collaboration, learning innovation, and student academic achievement. Thus, this leadership approach should be the main reference in the training and development of future principals. The combination of these two styles is not only theoretically relevant, but also proven to be applicable and positively impactful in various contexts of basic education in Indonesia. Principals who are able to carry out the role of transformational-instructional leaders will lead their educational institutions towards sustainable positive change, as well as create a healthy, dynamic, and quality-oriented school culture.

Teacher Professional Development

School principals have a strategic responsibility in ensuring that teachers continue to develop professionally, especially in terms of improving pedagogic competencies that greatly determine the success of the learning process. One concrete form of this role is to provide various training programs, workshops, mentoring, and scientific discussion forums that are structured and systematically designed to increase the capacity of teachers in managing learning. Through continuous professional development programs, teachers are equipped with the latest knowledge of learning theory, pedagogical approaches that are responsive to students' needs, and practical skills in designing and implementing innovative learning.

Progressive school principals will actively establish partnerships with external parties such as the education office, universities, and professional training institutions to open up teachers' access to quality and relevant training resources. Not only stopping at technical training, the principal also encourages the creation of a learning culture in the school environment by providing a space for reflection and collaboration between teachers, such as through lesson study activities, peer coaching, and learning communities.

This strategy aims to encourage teachers to share experiences, evaluate learning practices, and design improvements collectively and continuously. Teachers who attend professional development programs on a regular basis tend to show significant improvements in teaching skills, classroom management skills, and creativity in choosing methods that suit students' learning characteristics and needs. This ultimately has a direct impact on improving student learning motivation and overall learning quality.

School principals who have a high concern for teacher professional development also actively facilitate the preparation of annual work programs that contain an agenda to increase teacher capacity, as well as allocate school budgets proportionally to support these activities. They not only act as facilitators, but also as motivators and evaluators who ensure that each competency improvement activity makes a tangible contribution to the achievement of educational goals.

In the era of educational transformation and the demands of the 21st century, teacher professional development cannot be seen as incidental activities, but rather must be part of the school's work culture. Principals who are able to foster this awareness will create a dynamic, reflective, and adaptive learning environment, where teachers are no longer just curriculum

implementers, but also innovators who continue to learn and innovate to improve the quality of teaching. Therefore, the leadership of school principals in the aspect of teacher professional development is an important key to the successful implementation of relevant, transformative, and student-oriented learning of current and future students.

Creation of a Conducive Work Environment

A positive and supportive work environment is an important factor that directly affects the enthusiasm, motivation, and dedication of teachers in carrying out their professional duties. Teachers who work in a psychologically healthy school setting will feel valued, supported, and motivated to give their best performance in the learning process. In this case, the role of the principal becomes very central because they are the ones who shape and maintain the organizational culture in the school environment.

Principals who are able to create an inclusive, open, and collaborative work climate will encourage the development of harmonious interpersonal relationships between teachers, education staff, and students. Such an environment provides space for teachers to express ideas, share experiences, and develop themselves without fear of downward criticism. Humanistic, empathetic, and supportive leadership makes the principal a figure who is trusted and respected by teachers, which ultimately creates an emotionally safe work atmosphere.

When teachers feel comfortable, valued, and involved in the school's decision-making process, they will show high loyalty and commitment to the school's vision and mission. The collaborative work culture built by the principal also increases the effectiveness of communication and teamwork between teachers, so that learning becomes more integrated and meaningful for students. Principals who are able to manage a balanced work rhythm, give appreciation for teachers' achievements, and are open to input, will strengthen teachers' sense of belonging to the institutions where they serve.

This sense of belonging is a strong internal driver to continue to innovate and contribute to creating quality learning. In addition, a healthy work environment also includes physical aspects such as supporting facilities, comfortable classrooms, access to technology, and the availability of adequate facilities. Principals who are responsive to teachers' operational needs will drive work efficiency and reduce unnecessary administrative burdens. In many cases, schools with a positive work climate tend to have low levels of work stress, minimal teacher absenteeism, and high student academic achievement. Cutting-edge research also shows that a conducive work environment plays an important role in the relationship between the principal's leadership style and teacher performance. In other words, the effectiveness of the principal's leadership is largely determined by the extent to which they are able to create a supportive work atmosphere.

In the context of basic education, where teachers have the dual role of educators and coaches of students' character, the need for a mentally well-being work environment is becoming increasingly vital. Therefore, school principals are required to not only manage the administrative aspects of the school, but also to be leaders who are able to manage social and emotional dynamics in their work environment. Only with a positive and supportive environment, teachers will be able to provide quality learning and form a generation of superior students.

Periodic Supervision and Evaluation

Through supervision and evaluation that are carried out regularly and systematically, school principals play an important role in monitoring teacher performance and ensuring that the learning process runs in accordance with the educational goals that have been set. Effective

supervision not only serves as a tool of administrative control, but more than that becomes a means of professional coaching that encourages teachers to develop continuously.

In this context, the principal plays the role of an academic advisor who not only assesses performance, but also provides support, direction, and constructive feedback that can be used as a basis for teachers to conduct self-reflection. Through classroom observation, post-observation discussions, and a review of student learning tools and outcomes, the principal can get a comprehensive picture of the strengths and weaknesses in a teacher's teaching process. Thus, the feedback provided becomes relevant, specific, and contextual, so that it really helps teachers in identifying areas that need improvement and designing learning strategies that are more effective and adaptive to the needs of students.

This supervision process should ideally be carried out in a dialogical and collaborative atmosphere, where teachers do not feel supervised in an authoritative context, but are fostered and accompanied in the framework of increasing professionalism. Principals who carry out supervision with a participatory approach will find it easier to build trust with teachers, so that the input provided is more accepted and internalized. In addition, periodic evaluation of teacher performance based on measurable indicators, such as mastery of materials, teaching methods, classroom management, and achievement of student learning outcomes, allows school principals to make data-based quality improvement program plans. Evaluation also provides a basis for more objective decision-making regarding promotions, awards, or additional assignments to outstanding teachers, as well as designing coaching interventions for teachers that still need to be improved. Principals who are able to utilize the results of supervision and evaluation to develop professional development programs that are tailored to their needs will create a work environment that is oriented towards continuous improvement.

Good supervision and evaluation should also include a reflective aspect, where teachers are encouraged to analyze their own learning practices, find solutions to challenges faced in the classroom, and devise more effective strategies in the future. In this case, the role of the principal as a facilitator of teacher learning is very important, because with the right guidance, teachers will be more confident and competent in carrying out their duties. In addition to strengthening individual competencies, supervision that is carried out consistently can also be an instrument for the formation of a quality culture in schools. When all teachers are committed to improving performance based on objective evaluation results, a professional atmosphere that is competitive and collaborative will be formed at the same time.

The results show that schools that implement a strong academic supervision system tend to have better learning quality and higher student achievement. Therefore, it is important for school principals to continue to develop their capacity in the field of supervision, including in the use of valid evaluation instruments, effective observation techniques, and persuasive communication skills. In the face of the increasingly complex challenges of 21st century education, the ability of school principals to utilize supervision and evaluation as a driving tool to improve the quality of teachers and learning is an aspect that cannot be ignored. Supervision and evaluation carried out with a humane, professional, and improvement-oriented approach not only improve teacher performance, but also become the key to building quality, adaptive, and sustainable educational institutions.

CONCLUSION

The leadership of school principals plays a very crucial role in determining the direction and quality of education delivery in elementary schools. In the context of learning that continues to evolve and demands continuous competency improvement, the principal functions not only as an administrative manager, but also as a learning leader who is able to inspire and direct teachers towards optimal performance. The application of transformational and instructional

leadership styles has been shown to have a significant impact on increasing teacher motivation, dedication, and professionalism.

Principals who are visionary, empathetic, and active in the academic process are able to create a work atmosphere that supports collaboration, innovation, and a high spirit of learning. In addition, the role of school principals in providing professional development programs, building a positive work environment, and carrying out constructive supervision and evaluation is key in creating quality and sustainable learning.

These leadership practices contribute significantly to the achievement of learning quality that is relevant to the needs of students and the demands of the times. Therefore, strengthening the capacity of school principals in leadership aspects needs to be a serious concern for education stakeholders. Training, mentoring, and performance appraisal systems for principals must be directed to support the birth of school leaders who are resilient, adaptive, and responsive to change. With strong leadership and quality-improvement orientation, elementary schools can be an ideal environment for the growth and development of a generation of learners with superior character.

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