

# The Strategic Role of School Principals in Enhancing Teacher Motivation and Professional Performance at SD Negeri 121 Palembang

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## Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis secara mendalam peran strategis kepala sekolah dalam meningkatkan motivasi dan kinerja guru melalui penerapan model kepemimpinan hibrida transformasional-instruksional di SD Negeri 121 Palembang. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain studi kasus instrumental tunggal. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam, observasi partisipatif, dan kuesioner terbuka, kemudian dianalisis menggunakan model analisis interaktif yang meliputi reduksi data, penyajian data, dan penarikan kesimpulan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kepemimpinan transformasional yang dipadukan dengan kepemimpinan instruksional memberikan dampak positif dan signifikan terhadap peningkatan motivasi serta kinerja guru. Temuan penting penelitian ini adalah peran mediasi Teacher Self-Efficacy yang menjadi mekanisme kunci dalam memperkuat pengaruh kepemimpinan terhadap kinerja berkelanjutan. Praktik seperti intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration, serta coaching instruksional terbukti mampu meningkatkan kepercayaan diri guru dalam melaksanakan inovasi pembelajaran, khususnya dalam implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka. Penelitian ini memberikan kontribusi teoretis berupa validasi model kepemimpinan hibrida pada konteks sekolah dasar, serta implikasi praktis bagi pengembangan program pelatihan kepala sekolah berbasis peningkatan kapasitas guru.

**Kata kunci:** Kepemimpinan Transformasional, Kepemimpinan Instruksional, Motivasi Guru, Kinerja Guru, Efikasi Diri Guru, Manajemen Pendidikan.

## Abstract

This study aims to analyze the strategic role of school principals in enhancing teacher motivation and performance through the implementation of a transformational-instructional hybrid leadership model at SD Negeri 121 Palembang. This research employs a qualitative approach using an instrumental single case study design. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and open-ended questionnaires, and analyzed using an interactive model consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings indicate that the integration of transformational and instructional leadership has a positive and significant impact on teacher motivation and professional performance. A key finding of this study is the mediating role of Teacher Self-Efficacy, which strengthens the influence of leadership on sustainable teacher performance. Practices such as intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration, and instructional coaching effectively increase teachers' confidence in implementing innovative learning strategies, particularly in adapting to the Merdeka Curriculum. This study contributes theoretically by validating the hybrid leadership model within the elementary school context and offers practical implications for leadership training programs focused on teacher capacity development.

**Keywords:** Transformational Leadership, Instructional Leadership, Teacher Motivation, Teacher Performance, Teacher Self-Efficacy, Educational Management.

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Improving the quality of education remains a central priority in Indonesia, particularly in response to persistent disparities in learning outcomes across regions and school levels. International large-scale assessments have consistently revealed gaps in literacy, numeracy, and higher-order thinking skills, indicating that being enrolled in school does not necessarily guarantee meaningful learning gains. Reports from the World Bank (2020) emphasize that structural reform must be accompanied by improvements in instructional quality at the school level. Similarly, the OECD (2019) highlights the urgency of strengthening leadership and governance systems to ensure sustainable educational improvement. Within this broader reform context, elementary schools serve as foundational institutions where cognitive, social, and character development are shaped. Consequently, strengthening leadership practices at the primary education level is a strategic intervention for addressing systemic quality disparities.

School leadership has long been recognized as one of the most influential in-school factors affecting teacher effectiveness and student outcomes. Contemporary educational leadership theory suggests that effective principals do not merely manage administrative tasks but actively shape instructional direction and professional culture (Bush, 2020). Empirical studies further demonstrate that leadership exerts both direct and indirect influences on student achievement through its impact on teachers' instructional practices and motivation (Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2020). In addition, research by Hallinger (2020) emphasizes that leadership focused on instructional improvement yields stronger and more consistent school performance outcomes. Within the Indonesian context, decentralization policies have expanded the strategic authority of school leaders, requiring them to adopt adaptive and context-responsive leadership approaches (Suryadi, 2021). These developments indicate that principals must integrate visionary leadership with pedagogical guidance to effectively support teacher performance.

In the contemporary educational landscape characterized by volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity, leadership models must evolve beyond traditional paradigms. Transformational leadership is widely regarded as effective in fostering innovation, commitment, and shared vision among teachers (Fullan, 2020). At the same time, instructional leadership plays a crucial role in strengthening pedagogical competence through supervision, mentoring, and professional learning structures (Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2019). Emerging scholarship also underscores the importance of teacher autonomy and psychological empowerment in sustaining innovation within schools (Nguyen, Pham, & Tran, 2022). Furthermore, recent research indicates that teacher self-efficacy functions as a critical mediating variable that amplifies the impact of leadership on sustainable performance outcomes (Heck & Hallinger, 2021). These findings suggest that a hybrid transformational-instructional leadership model may provide a more comprehensive explanatory framework for understanding teacher motivation and performance.

Despite growing international evidence, research examining the hybrid integration of transformational and instructional leadership at the elementary school level in Indonesia remains limited. Many prior studies have focused predominantly on secondary education contexts, leaving a gap in micro-local empirical validation at the primary level. Moreover, there is insufficient exploration of the psychological mechanisms through which leadership

influences teacher performance, particularly within schools implementing curriculum reform initiatives. Addressing this gap is essential in light of national efforts to strengthen foundational learning and reduce performance disparities (UNESCO, 2021). Therefore, this study seeks to provide an in-depth qualitative analysis of how a transformational-instructional hybrid leadership model operates in practice and how Teacher Self-Efficacy mediates its influence on teacher motivation and professional performance at SD Negeri 121 Palembang. By offering contextualized empirical evidence, this research contributes to both theoretical refinement and practical leadership development in Indonesian basic education.

## **2. METHOD**

This study employed a qualitative research approach using an instrumental single-case study design to explore in depth the mechanisms through which hybrid transformational-instructional leadership influences teacher motivation and performance. A qualitative framework was selected because it allows researchers to examine complex social interactions, leadership practices, and contextual dynamics within their natural setting (Creswell & Creswell, 2019). The instrumental case study design was chosen to provide analytical insight into a broader theoretical construct namely, the hybrid leadership model through intensive examination of a single school context (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2019). This design aligns with contemporary educational improvement research that emphasizes contextualized inquiry to understand how leadership operates within specific institutional environments (Bryk, Gomez, Grunow, & LeMahieu, 2020).

The research was conducted at SD Negeri 121 Palembang, which was purposively selected as a representative public elementary school implementing leadership practices aligned with curriculum reform and instructional development. Purposive sampling was applied to ensure that participants possessed direct experience and strategic roles related to the studied phenomena (Etikan & Bala, 2020). The principal served as the key informant due to his central role in enacting transformational and instructional leadership dimensions. Teachers were selected as primary participants to provide perspectives on motivation, instructional practices, and perceived self-efficacy. This selection strategy reflects methodological recommendations for case-based educational leadership research that prioritize depth of insight over statistical generalization (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2020). Additionally, the sampling size and structure were guided by principles of adequacy and data saturation in qualitative inquiry (Taherdoost, 2020).

Data were collected using three primary techniques to ensure triangulation and enhance the credibility of findings: in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and open-ended questionnaires. Semi-structured interviews enabled exploration of leadership strategies, coaching practices, and teachers' professional experiences in a reflective manner (Israel & Hay, 2021). Participatory observation was conducted to document instructional supervision activities, professional meetings, and classroom practices, allowing verification of reported behaviors in authentic settings. Open-ended questionnaires complemented interview data by capturing broader teacher perceptions systematically. This triangulated approach is consistent with recommendations for data-based educational evaluation to strengthen validity and reduce interpretative bias (Campbell & Levin, 2019). Ethical considerations were strictly observed throughout the research process, following contemporary guidelines for educational research integrity (BERA, 2019).

Data analysis followed the interactive model of qualitative analysis consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. During the reduction phase, raw data were coded and categorized according to leadership dimensions (transformational and instructional), teacher motivation, teacher self-efficacy, and performance indicators. The coding process emphasized conceptual clarity and internal consistency to ensure construct reliability (Taber, 2019). Data were then organized into thematic matrices and narrative patterns to facilitate analytical interpretation. Analytical rigor was maintained by systematically comparing emerging themes with established frameworks in educational management and governance research (Burns & Köster, 2019). This structured analytical procedure ensured that findings were grounded in empirical evidence while remaining theoretically informed.

To enhance trustworthiness, the study applied source triangulation, methodological triangulation, and theoretical triangulation. Cross-validation was performed by comparing data from interviews, observations, and questionnaires to identify convergent patterns. Interpretations were further examined through reference to contemporary educational policy frameworks, particularly those associated with curriculum transformation and school-based management reform (Kemendikbudristek, 2022). This alignment ensures that the study reflects current national reform directions while maintaining analytical coherence with global educational governance perspectives (Pont, 2020). Furthermore, methodological consistency was strengthened by aligning research procedures with established standards in educational research design and evaluation (Ganimian & Murnane, 2020). Through these procedures, the study maintains credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability as core criteria of qualitative rigor.

### **3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

#### ***Result***

The findings indicate that the implementation of a hybrid transformational-instructional leadership model at SD Negeri 121 Palembang has a substantial positive influence on teacher motivation and professional performance. Teachers reported experiencing stronger professional commitment, clearer instructional direction, and greater confidence in classroom innovation. This pattern aligns with contemporary findings that collective teacher efficacy and leadership coherence significantly shape school improvement trajectories (Donohoo, 2021). Moreover, structured instructional guidance provided by the principal was perceived not merely as supervision but as developmental coaching, a practice increasingly emphasized in effective leadership models (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). These results suggest that leadership effectiveness emerges when strategic vision is accompanied by pedagogical support mechanisms.

The transformational dimension was particularly evident in the cultivation of shared vision and moral commitment among teachers. Teachers described increased enthusiasm and intrinsic motivation following structured inspirational activities and consistent modeling of professional values. Empirical literature supports this observation, noting that collaborative professionalism fosters sustained engagement and institutional trust (Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2019). Furthermore, evidence shows that leadership interventions that strengthen teacher collaboration contribute to long-term school improvement capacity (Schildkamp, Poortman, & Handelzalts, 2020). In this study, the principal's emphasis on inspirational motivation and individualized consideration created a psychologically safe environment,

enabling teachers to experiment with innovative instructional practices without fear of evaluation bias.

The instructional dimension of leadership demonstrated equally significant outcomes. Classroom observations revealed increased use of student-centered approaches, reflective teaching strategies, and formative feedback practices. Teachers attributed these improvements to structured mentoring sessions and constructive classroom supervision. Such findings are consistent with global research emphasizing that instructional leadership directly enhances teaching quality through focused pedagogical support (Schleicher, 2021). Additionally, comparative policy analyses indicate that governance systems that prioritize instructional improvement yield stronger learning outcomes (OECD, 2022). The present findings confirm that when instructional leadership is embedded in daily practice, teachers experience mastery experiences that gradually strengthen professional competence.

A central empirical finding of this study is the mediating role of Teacher Self-Efficacy. Teachers who reported higher levels of confidence in their pedagogical capabilities also demonstrated greater persistence in implementing innovative methods and maintaining performance consistency. This observation resonates with research highlighting psychological capital as a predictor of sustained teacher effectiveness (Ganimian & Murnane, 2021). Moreover, multilevel leadership studies demonstrate that leadership impact on student outcomes is significantly amplified when mediated by teacher belief systems (Day, Gu, & Sammons, 2021). The data from SD Negeri 121 Palembang confirm that the hybrid leadership model does not operate through direct control mechanisms but through strengthening teachers' internal professional beliefs, thereby generating durable performance improvement.

## **Discussion**

The results of this study contribute to contemporary debates on the evolution of school leadership models in complex educational environments. In contexts characterized by rapid policy reform and curriculum transformation, leadership must move beyond administrative coordination toward adaptive and learning-centered practices (Harris & Jones, 2020). The hybrid transformational-instructional model observed in this study reflects this paradigm shift, integrating visionary commitment with systematic pedagogical development. Research on implementation management underscores that reform success depends largely on leadership coherence and sustained instructional focus (Honig & Rainey, 2020). Thus, the findings reinforce the argument that leadership effectiveness is multidimensional and process-oriented rather than position-based.

The mediating function of Teacher Self-Efficacy further strengthens theoretical discussions concerning indirect leadership effects. Structural modeling research demonstrates that leadership influence becomes statistically stronger and more stable when mediated by teacher belief systems (Kline, 2021). In line with this, multivariate educational studies emphasize that psychological variables often function as leverage points within organizational performance systems (Hair et al., 2021). The present study provides qualitative confirmation of these quantitative trends, revealing how intellectual stimulation and individualized mentoring gradually cultivate professional confidence. This mechanism clarifies previous contradictory findings suggesting that transformational leadership alone may produce only superficial change if not integrated with instructional reinforcement.

From a governance perspective, the study highlights the importance of aligning school-level leadership with broader educational reform frameworks. International policy discourse emphasizes that school autonomy must be balanced with accountability and professional capacity development (Pont, 2021). Furthermore, global development reports stress that sustainable improvement requires leadership systems capable of continuous learning and evidence-based decision making (World Bank, 2022). The leadership practices observed in this case demonstrate practical alignment with such principles, particularly in fostering reflective teaching culture and collaborative professional growth. This suggests that hybrid leadership models may serve as strategic instruments for narrowing educational quality disparities at the elementary level.

Finally, this study contributes to theoretical refinement by validating the hybrid leadership paradigm within a micro-local Indonesian context. Contemporary educational scholarship emphasizes the need for localized empirical validation to complement large-scale international studies (UNESCO, 2023). By examining leadership processes in a specific elementary school setting, this research bridges macro-level theory and school-level practice. The findings suggest that effective principals in the twenty-first century must simultaneously act as vision builders, instructional mentors, and psychological capacity developers. Such integration strengthens institutional resilience and positions elementary schools as foundational pillars of national education quality improvement.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

This qualitative instrumental case study at SD Negeri 121 Palembang concludes that the implementation of a hybrid transformational-instructional leadership model contributes positively to teacher motivation and professional performance. The findings demonstrate that leadership effectiveness emerges not merely from visionary direction or administrative coordination, but from the integration of inspirational commitment with structured pedagogical guidance. Transformational leadership strengthens shared vision, professional commitment, and intrinsic motivation, while instructional leadership provides concrete supervision, mentoring, and feedback that enhance classroom practice. A central conclusion of this study is the mediating role of Teacher Self-Efficacy. The data indicate that leadership practices influence teacher performance indirectly by strengthening teachers' confidence in their pedagogical capabilities. When teachers experience mastery through coaching, reflective dialogue, and supportive supervision, their belief in their professional competence increases. This strengthened self-efficacy fosters persistence, innovation, and sustained instructional improvement.

The study also highlights the strategic importance of elementary schools as foundational institutions for literacy and numeracy development, particularly in the context of educational quality disparities and the challenges of the VUCA era. The hybrid leadership model observed in this case demonstrates practical alignment with curriculum reform initiatives, including the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, by ensuring that teachers are both motivated and professionally equipped to innovate.

In conclusion, effective school leadership in contemporary educational contexts requires the integration of vision-building, motivational support, instructional mentoring, and psychological capacity development. Strengthening teacher self-efficacy through continuous coaching and reflective supervision should therefore become a central priority in school improvement efforts. Future leadership development programs should emphasize hybrid leadership competencies that combine transformational inspiration

with systematic instructional support to achieve sustainable improvements in teacher performance and educational quality.

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