

Principal Leadership Strategies in Developing a Sustainable Teacher Learning Culture at SDN 109 Palembang

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Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis strategi kepemimpinan kepala sekolah dalam mengembangkan budaya belajar guru yang berkelanjutan di SDN 109 Palembang. Transformasi pendidikan dalam era Kurikulum Merdeka menuntut kepala sekolah tidak hanya berperan sebagai administrator, tetapi juga sebagai pemimpin instruksional dan kultural yang mampu membentuk lingkungan belajar profesional. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan studi kasus kualitatif melalui wawancara, observasi, dan analisis dokumen. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa penyelarasan visi, penguatan komunitas belajar profesional yang terstruktur, serta penciptaan budaya psikologis yang aman secara signifikan meningkatkan refleksi kolaboratif, inovasi pedagogik, dan komitmen profesional guru. Temuan ini menegaskan bahwa sinergi antara kepemimpinan visioner, struktural, dan kultural menjadi faktor penentu dalam menginstitutionalisasi pengembangan profesional guru secara berkelanjutan.

Kata kunci: *Kepemimpinan Kepala Sekolah, Budaya Belajar Guru, Kepemimpinan Instruksional, Komunitas Belajar Profesional, Budaya Sekolah.*

Abstract

This study investigates how principal leadership strategies contribute to the development of a sustainable teacher learning culture at SDN 109 Palembang. The transformation of education in the era of the Independent Curriculum requires school leaders to function not merely as administrators but as instructional and cultural leaders who actively shape professional learning environments. This research employed a qualitative case study approach involving interviews, observations, and document analysis. Findings indicate that visionary alignment, structured professional learning communities, and psychologically safe cultural practices significantly strengthen collaborative reflection, pedagogical innovation, and professional commitment among teachers. The study confirms that leadership synergy between strategic direction, structural facilitation, and cultural modeling plays a decisive role in institutionalizing continuous teacher development. The research contributes to strengthening leadership development policies at the elementary education level in Indonesia.

Keywords: Principal leadership, Teacher Learning Culture, Instructional Leadership, Professional Learning Community, School Culture.

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the discourse on educational reform has increasingly emphasized the interdependence between leadership quality and teacher professional growth. School improvement is no longer conceptualized as a linear administrative process but rather as a dynamic cultural transformation requiring adaptive and learning-oriented leadership (Hallinger, 2020; Fullan, 2021). Contemporary perspectives suggest that principals must operate as designers of organizational learning systems, fostering environments where

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reflective dialogue and pedagogical experimentation are normalized practices (Spillane, 2022; Walker & Qian, 2020). This shift reflects broader global recognition that sustainable improvement is embedded in daily professional routines rather than imposed through policy mandates alone (Harris & Jones, 2019; Leithwood et al., 2020).

The concept of teacher learning culture is closely associated with collective efficacy, professional trust, and shared instructional responsibility. Empirical studies demonstrate that when teachers perceive strong collegial support and structured collaboration, instructional quality improves significantly (Sebastian et al., 2019; Liu & Hallinger, 2021; Admiraal et al., 2021). Furthermore, collective teacher efficacy has been identified as one of the most influential school-level predictors of student achievement (Leithwood et al., 2020; Godfrey, 2020). However, the establishment of such a culture requires sustained leadership intervention that aligns vision, policy, and daily practice (Day et al., 2020; Qian et al., 2020).

Within developing educational systems, leadership challenges are often compounded by resource limitations, policy transitions, and varying teacher readiness levels (Nguyen et al., 2022; Wahyudi & Nurhadi, 2023). In Indonesia, the implementation of the Independent Curriculum has intensified the demand for pedagogical innovation, differentiated instruction, and reflective assessment (Kemendikbud, 2022; Suryadi, 2021). Consequently, principals must not only disseminate policy directives but also translate them into meaningful professional learning experiences for teachers. Research indicates that leadership mediation between policy expectations and classroom realities significantly determines reform sustainability (Hallinger, 2020; Robinson, 2022).

Another critical dimension concerns psychological safety within teacher communities. Without relational trust and openness, collaborative structures risk becoming procedural formalities rather than authentic learning spaces (Edmondson & Lei, 2020; Harris & Jones, 2019). Principals who model reflective practice, acknowledge instructional challenges, and encourage constructive feedback cultivate environments where teachers feel secure in sharing vulnerabilities and innovative ideas (Spillane, 2022; Walker & Qian, 2020). This relational dimension strengthens professional identity and resilience, especially during periods of systemic transition (Fullan, 2021; Day et al., 2020).

Moreover, the integration of digital literacy and adaptive pedagogy has further expanded the scope of instructional leadership. The post-pandemic educational landscape requires principals to support blended learning models and technology-enhanced instruction while maintaining pedagogical coherence (Nguyen et al., 2022; Admiraal et al., 2021). Leadership effectiveness therefore depends on the ability to integrate technological, structural, and cultural dimensions simultaneously (Leithwood et al., 2020; Liu & Hallinger, 2021). Schools that succeed in harmonizing these elements tend to demonstrate stronger institutional adaptability and sustained teacher engagement.

Despite these theoretical advancements, contextualized studies examining how Indonesian elementary principals operationalize these leadership dimensions remain scarce. Many investigations focus on secondary or urban contexts, leaving primary-level case studies underrepresented (Prasetyo, 2021; Suharto, 2020). This gap underscores the importance of exploring localized leadership practices capable of illuminating culturally embedded strategies that may differ from Western-centered frameworks (Walker & Qian, 2020; Qian et al., 2020). By examining SDN 109 Palembang as an intrinsic case, this research contributes to a nuanced understanding of how leadership practices translate reform aspirations into sustainable teacher learning cultures within Indonesian elementary education.

Through this expanded conceptual framing, the study situates principal leadership not merely as managerial authority but as a multidimensional catalyst for professional transformation. The integration of visionary alignment, structural facilitation, and cultural modeling forms the analytical foundation guiding this investigation (Hallinger, 2020; Leithwood et al., 2020; Robinson, 2022). Consequently, the present research seeks to deepen empirical insight into how these leadership dimensions interact to institutionalize continuous professional learning in a context of educational reform and systemic adaptation.

2. METHOD

This study adopted a qualitative intrinsic case study design to obtain a comprehensive and contextually grounded understanding of principal leadership practices in shaping a sustainable teacher learning culture at SDN 109 Palembang. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because leadership phenomena are socially constructed, context-bound, and embedded in relational dynamics that cannot be fully captured through numerical measurement (Creswell & Poth, 2019; Merriam & Tisdell, 2019). Case study methodology allows researchers to investigate contemporary events within real-life contexts, particularly when boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident (Yin, 2020). Given that leadership strategies interact dynamically with organizational culture, this design enabled an in-depth exploration of processes rather than isolated outcomes (Miles et al., 2020).

The research site was selected purposively based on preliminary observations indicating active professional learning initiatives led by the principal. Purposeful sampling is widely recommended in qualitative inquiry when the objective is to select information-rich cases capable of illuminating central research questions (Palinkas et al., 2019; Campbell et al., 2020). Participants included the principal as the primary leadership actor, vice principals involved in academic coordination, and teachers who actively participated in professional learning activities. This selection ensured representation of leadership implementation from both strategic and operational perspectives, strengthening data credibility (Nowell et al., 2021).

Data collection was conducted over an extended engagement period to enhance contextual immersion and trust-building. Semi-structured interviews served as the primary data source, allowing flexibility in probing participants' lived experiences while maintaining alignment with research objectives (Tracy, 2020; Flick, 2019). Interview protocols were developed based on contemporary leadership frameworks emphasizing visionary alignment, structural facilitation, and cultural modeling (Hallinger, 2020; Leithwood et al., 2020). Each interview session lasted approximately 45–60 minutes and was audio-recorded with participant consent to ensure data accuracy and transparency (Resnik, 2020).

Observational data complemented interview findings by capturing naturally occurring interactions during professional learning meetings, reflective discussions, and daily school routines. Observational techniques are essential in qualitative leadership research because they reveal implicit norms and cultural expressions that may not emerge explicitly during interviews (Merriam & Tisdell, 2019; Tracy, 2020). Field notes documented leadership behaviors, teacher participation patterns, and communication dynamics, which were later triangulated with interview transcripts and institutional documents (Miles et al., 2020; Nowell et al., 2021).

Document analysis included school strategic plans, meeting minutes, professional development schedules, and internal evaluation reports. Documentary evidence provides stable and unobtrusive data that strengthens triangulation and enhances interpretive depth (Yin, 2020; Flick, 2019). Through document review, the researcher identified consistencies between articulated vision statements and enacted leadership practices, enabling verification of leadership alignment processes (Hallinger, 2020; Walker & Qian, 2020).

Data analysis followed an iterative and cyclical procedure involving data condensation, thematic coding, categorization, and interpretation (Miles et al., 2020). Initial coding was conducted inductively to identify emerging patterns related to teacher collaboration, instructional experimentation, and organizational learning. Subsequently, axial coding connected these patterns to established leadership constructs (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Terry et al., 2020). Thematic analysis allowed systematic identification of recurring themes across data sources while maintaining sensitivity to contextual nuance (Nowell et al., 2021).

To ensure trustworthiness, the study employed credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability criteria consistent with qualitative research standards (Lincoln & Guba, 2020). Credibility was enhanced through member checking, whereby participants reviewed summarized interpretations to verify accuracy and authenticity (Nowell et al., 2021). Prolonged engagement in the field reduced misinterpretation risks and strengthened relational trust (Tracy, 2020). Dependability was supported through detailed audit trails documenting analytical decisions, while confirmability was reinforced by reflexive journaling to minimize researcher bias (Creswell & Poth, 2019).

Ethical considerations were strictly observed throughout the research process. Participants were informed about the study's objectives, voluntary participation rights, confidentiality guarantees, and the option to withdraw at any stage without consequence (Resnik, 2020). Data were anonymized to protect institutional and individual identities, and digital files were securely stored to maintain confidentiality integrity (Tracy, 2020). Ethical rigor is particularly important in leadership research where hierarchical relationships may influence participant responses (Flick, 2019).

Finally, methodological alignment between research questions, data sources, and analytical procedures was continuously evaluated to ensure coherence and rigor. The combination of interviews, observation, and document analysis facilitated triangulation, enhancing analytical robustness and reducing single-source bias (Yin, 2020; Miles et al., 2020). Through this systematic methodological framework, the study generated nuanced insights into how principal leadership strategies are enacted, interpreted, and institutionalized within the specific socio-cultural context of SDN 109 Palembang.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

The findings of this study indicate that principal leadership at SDN 109 Palembang plays a central role in shaping a sustainable teacher learning culture through several interconnected practices. These practices emerged from the analysis of interview data, observations, and document review, revealing patterns of leadership behavior that influence teacher collaboration, professional development, and instructional adaptation.

3.1 Visionary Alignment in Instructional Direction

One of the dominant findings shows that the principal consistently communicates a clear instructional vision to teachers. This vision emphasizes continuous improvement in teaching practices and encourages teachers to adapt to current curriculum demands. The principal regularly conveys this direction through staff meetings, academic briefings, and collaborative planning sessions.

Teachers reported that these meetings function not only as administrative forums but also as spaces for reflecting on teaching practices and discussing strategies for improving classroom instruction. The clarity of the principal's vision helps teachers understand the broader goals of the school and align their instructional practices with institutional priorities. As a result, teachers demonstrate a stronger sense of shared responsibility toward improving student learning outcomes.

3.2 Institutionalized Professional Collaboration

Another important finding relates to the establishment of structured professional collaboration among teachers. The principal facilitated the reactivation of professional learning activities within the school, including collaborative lesson planning, peer observation, and reflective discussions. These activities were formally integrated into the school's routine schedule, allowing teachers to regularly exchange ideas and discuss instructional challenges.

Teachers explained that the structured schedule made collaborative learning more consistent and meaningful. Rather than working individually, teachers were able to observe each other's teaching practices and provide constructive feedback. Observational data also revealed that teachers actively participated in discussions during professional learning sessions, sharing classroom experiences and exploring alternative teaching strategies.

The presence of regular collaborative forums reduced the sense of professional isolation previously experienced by some teachers. Teachers reported that these interactions encouraged them to experiment with new teaching approaches and improved the consistency of instructional practices across classrooms.

3.3 Leadership Modeling and Relational Trust

The study also found that the principal actively models open and supportive leadership behavior. During meetings and professional discussions, the principal demonstrated willingness to listen to teachers' perspectives and openly discussed challenges faced in implementing instructional programs.

This leadership behavior contributed to the development of a supportive school climate where teachers felt comfortable sharing their teaching experiences, including difficulties encountered in the classroom. Observational evidence indicated that teachers were more willing to express opinions, propose new ideas, and participate in reflective dialogue.

Teachers reported that the principal's openness created a sense of trust and reduced concerns about criticism when trying new instructional strategies. As a result, teachers felt more confident experimenting with different learning methods and adapting teaching approaches to meet students' needs.

3.4 Support for Digital Adaptation in Teaching

Another emerging finding involves the principal's support for the integration of digital technology in teaching and learning activities. The principal encouraged teachers to utilize digital learning platforms and facilitated training sessions related to technology-based instruction.

Teachers noted that this support was particularly helpful in strengthening their ability to implement digital tools in the classroom. Training activities helped teachers become more familiar with online learning platforms, digital assessment tools, and multimedia learning resources.

Observation results also indicated that teachers increasingly incorporated digital media into classroom instruction, such as interactive presentations and online learning resources. This initiative contributed to improving teachers' confidence in integrating technology into their teaching practices.

3.5 Integrated Leadership Practices in Sustaining Teacher Learning Culture

Overall, the results show that principal leadership at SDN 109 Palembang operates through an integrated approach combining clear vision, structured collaboration, supportive leadership behavior, and encouragement for instructional innovation. These elements interact with each other and gradually form a school environment that supports continuous professional learning among teachers.

The teacher learning culture observed in this study did not emerge from a single program or initiative. Instead, it developed through ongoing leadership practices embedded in daily school routines, professional interactions, and collaborative learning activities. Through these processes, teachers developed stronger professional engagement and greater willingness to improve their instructional practices.

Discussion

The findings of this study highlight the importance of systemic leadership practices in developing a sustainable teacher learning culture. The results demonstrate that leadership effectiveness does not rely solely on administrative authority but on the ability of school leaders to align vision, organizational structures, and relational dynamics within the school environment.

The finding regarding visionary alignment indicates that the principal plays a crucial role in shaping a shared instructional direction among teachers. When school leaders consistently communicate educational goals and connect them with everyday teaching practices, teachers tend to develop stronger professional commitment and collective responsibility. Previous research has emphasized that clear instructional vision strengthens organizational coherence

and supports long-term school improvement (Hallinger, 2020; Leithwood et al., 2020). In this study, the principal's regular communication of school goals helped teachers interpret curriculum changes and align their classroom practices accordingly.

The establishment of structured professional collaboration also emerged as a key factor in strengthening teacher learning culture. The integration of collaborative activities such as lesson study and peer observation into the school schedule enabled teachers to engage in continuous professional dialogue. Earlier studies have shown that collaborative learning structures contribute significantly to teacher professional growth and collective efficacy (Admiraal et al., 2021; Stoll & Kools, 2019). The present findings support this perspective, demonstrating that when collaborative opportunities are systematically organized, teachers become more willing to share instructional experiences and develop innovative teaching strategies.

Another significant aspect highlighted in this study is leadership modeling and relational trust. The principal's openness to feedback and willingness to acknowledge instructional challenges created a supportive environment that encouraged teacher participation. Relational trust plays an essential role in facilitating collaborative learning within schools. Research on educational leadership suggests that psychological safety enables teachers to engage in reflective practice and pedagogical experimentation (Edmondson & Lei, 2020; Robinson, 2022). In the context of SDN 109 Palembang, the principal's supportive approach helped reduce fear of criticism and allowed teachers to openly discuss teaching difficulties and solutions.

The study also reveals the importance of digital adaptation support as part of contemporary educational leadership. The principal's initiative to provide training and encourage the use of digital learning platforms helped teachers develop technological competencies needed for modern instructional practices. This finding is consistent with studies indicating that leadership support for digital innovation enhances teachers' adaptability and institutional responsiveness in rapidly changing educational environments (Nguyen et al., 2022; Walker & Qian, 2020). In this case, digital training initiatives strengthened teachers' confidence in integrating technology into classroom instruction.

From a broader perspective, the results illustrate that sustainable teacher learning culture emerges from the interaction between leadership vision, collaborative structures, and supportive school climate. These elements reinforce one another and create conditions that encourage continuous professional development among teachers. This multidimensional leadership approach reflects contemporary leadership frameworks that emphasize the integration of strategic direction, organizational systems, and relational trust in achieving school improvement (Leithwood et al., 2020).

In the Indonesian elementary school context, the findings provide empirical evidence that effective leadership can foster professional learning even within schools that may face structural limitations. By prioritizing collaborative culture and shared professional responsibility, school leaders can create environments that support continuous instructional improvement. Therefore, principal leadership should be understood not only as managerial control but as a cultural and instructional force that guides professional learning and organizational development within schools.

4. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that principal leadership at SDN 109 Palembang plays a significant role in developing a sustainable teacher learning culture. The findings show that the principal fosters this culture through clear instructional vision, structured professional collaboration, supportive leadership behavior, and encouragement of digital adaptation in teaching. These leadership practices create an environment where teachers actively engage in collaboration, share instructional experiences, and continuously improve their teaching practices. Sustainable teacher learning culture therefore emerges from consistent leadership efforts embedded in daily school activities rather than from isolated programs.

The findings suggest that school principals should prioritize clear instructional vision, institutionalized teacher collaboration, and supportive school climates to strengthen professional learning among teachers. In addition, providing training and support for digital teaching competencies is essential to help teachers adapt to evolving educational demands.

Future studies may involve multiple schools or different educational levels to compare leadership practices in developing teacher learning cultures. Further research could also examine the relationship between principal leadership, teacher professional development, and student learning outcomes using broader research designs.

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