

The Principal's Leadership Strategy in Improving Teacher Performance through Effective Conflict Management and Strengthening Organizational Culture

Zainul Rifqi¹

¹Universitas PGRI Palembang, Indonesia

*Corresponding author: zainulrifqi.zr@gmail.com

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis strategi kepemimpinan kepala sekolah dalam meningkatkan kinerja guru melalui pengelolaan konflik yang efektif dan penguatan budaya organisasi. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan metode studi kasus yang dilaksanakan di SMP Negeri 35 Palembang. Teknik pengumpulan data dilakukan melalui wawancara, observasi, dan analisis dokumen. Informan penelitian terdiri atas kepala sekolah, wakil kepala sekolah, empat orang guru, dan satu staf tata usaha. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa: (1) kepala sekolah menerapkan gaya kepemimpinan transformasional partisipatif; (2) pengelolaan konflik dilakukan secara sistematis melalui identifikasi masalah, mediasi, dan tindak lanjut; (3) budaya organisasi diperkuat melalui penanaman nilai-nilai kolaborasi, disiplin, dan inovasi; serta (4) sinergi antara kepemimpinan, pengelolaan konflik, dan budaya organisasi mendukung peningkatan kinerja guru, khususnya dalam aspek kedisiplinan, kerja sama, dan kreativitas dalam pembelajaran. Penelitian ini merekomendasikan agar kepala sekolah mendapatkan pelatihan khusus dalam pengelolaan konflik serta melakukan penguatan budaya sekolah secara berkelanjutan.

Kata kunci: kepemimpinan kepala sekolah, kinerja guru, pengelolaan konflik, budaya organisasi, sekolah menengah pertama

Abstract

This study aims to analyze the principal's leadership strategy in improving teacher performance through effective conflict management and strengthening organizational culture. The research employed a qualitative approach with a case study method conducted at SMP Negeri 35 Palembang, using interviews, observations, and document analysis as data collection techniques. The research informants included the principal, vice principals, four teachers, and one administrative staff member. The findings of the study indicate that: (1) the principal applies a transformational-participative leadership style; (2) conflict management is carried out systematically through problem identification, mediation, and follow-up actions; (3) the organizational culture is strengthened through the cultivation of values such as collaboration, discipline, and innovation; and (4) the synergy between leadership, conflict management, and organizational culture has a positive impact on improving teacher performance, particularly in aspects of discipline, collaboration, and teaching creativity. The study recommends that school principals receive specialized training in conflict management and the continuous strengthening of school culture.

Keywords: Principal Leadership, Teacher Performance, Conflict Management, Organizational Culture, Junior High School (SMP)

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1. INTRODUCTION

The leadership of a school principal plays an important role in determining the direction and quality of educational implementation within a school (Leithwood & Sun, 2019; Robinson, 2021). Teacher performance serves as one of the main indicators of leadership effectiveness, as it reflects the principal's ability to create a productive and collaborative work environment (Day et al., 2021). In practice, however, the dynamics of interpersonal relationships within schools often lead to conflicts that may influence teachers' performance and organizational stability.

A principal does not only function as an administrator but also as an instructional leader responsible for guiding the school's vision, mission, and culture toward improving educational quality. Previous studies emphasize that effective leadership can influence teachers' motivation, collaboration, and performance, both directly and indirectly (Leithwood & Sun, 2019; Robinson, 2021). Principals who are able to inspire, motivate, and build shared commitment tend to create more productive and innovative work environments (Day et al., 2021; Bass, 2019).

Teacher performance, as the frontline of educational practice, includes pedagogical, professional, social, and personal competencies demonstrated through lesson planning, implementation, and evaluation (Supardi, 2023). However, efforts to improve teacher performance have not always produced consistent results. Internal and external factors such as organizational dynamics, interpersonal conflicts, and weak school culture may influence these outcomes (Suyadi, 2022; Robbins & Judge, 2019).

Conflicts within school organizations are natural due to differences in values, perceptions, interests, and communication styles among members. Rahim (2019) explains that conflict is not always negative when managed effectively. Constructive conflict management can strengthen relationships, improve collaboration, and encourage innovation. Nevertheless, in many schools, conflict management tends to be reactive rather than systematic, which may limit its contribution to teacher performance (Zurlo et al., 2020).

Organizational culture also plays a significant role in shaping teacher behavior and performance. School culture consists of shared values, beliefs, and norms that guide the actions of its members (Schein, 2020). A positive culture can build a sense of belonging and collective responsibility (Denison, 2020). Several studies indicate that strong organizational culture is associated with better engagement and reduced conflict (Munster, 2022). However, developing a consistent and value-based culture remains a challenge in many schools.

Conceptually, transformational leadership highlights the leader's role in inspiring shared vision and strengthening commitment (Leithwood & Sun, 2019), while participative leadership emphasizes collaboration and mutual trust (Yukl, 2022). Integrating leadership practices with effective conflict management and cultural strengthening may provide a comprehensive approach to supporting teacher performance.

Despite the growing body of research on leadership, conflict management, and organizational culture, limited studies have examined how these three aspects interact simultaneously within the context of public junior high schools in Indonesia, particularly in Palembang. Most previous studies tend to focus on only one or two of these variables. Therefore, further exploration is needed to understand how they operate together in real school settings.

This study aims to explore the relationship between principal leadership strategies, conflict management practices, and organizational culture strengthening in improving teacher performance at SMP Negeri 35 Palembang. The research seeks to answer the following questions: (1) How do principals develop strategies to improve teacher performance? (2) How is conflict management implemented in the school? (3) How does organizational culture strengthening support teacher performance? (4) How do these three aspects interact within the school context?

2. METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach using a single case study design. This design was selected to obtain an in-depth understanding of the principal's leadership practices within their real-life context (Yin, 2022). The research focused on one institution, SMP Negeri 35 Palembang, which was considered to have distinctive leadership practices and organizational dynamics.

The study was conducted from February to May 2025. Participants were selected using purposive sampling based on their roles and direct involvement in school management. The participants consisted of the principal, two vice principals responsible for curriculum and student affairs, four teachers from different subject areas, and one administrative staff member. The number of participants was determined based on data saturation, meaning data collection was stopped when no new information emerged (Creswell, 2022).

Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore participants' experiences and perceptions regarding leadership strategies, conflict management, and organizational culture. Each interview lasted between 45 and 90 minutes and was audio-recorded with participants' consent. Participant observation was carried out during teacher meetings, school assemblies, and daily activities to understand leadership interactions and conflict resolution practices. Document analysis included reviewing meeting minutes, teacher performance reports, school regulations, and internal policies to support and verify data obtained from interviews and observations.

The researcher acted as the primary instrument in collecting and interpreting data (Moleong, 2018). Supporting instruments included interview guidelines, field notes, audio recordings, and relevant documents. Data analysis followed the Miles and Huberman (2022) model,

consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Data reduction involved organizing and selecting relevant information. Data display was presented in thematic form to identify patterns related to leadership, conflict management, and organizational culture. Conclusions were drawn after verifying the consistency of findings across data sources.

To ensure credibility, the study applied source triangulation, method triangulation, and member checking. Source triangulation compared information from different participants. Method triangulation combined interviews, observations, and document analysis. Member checking was conducted by confirming the findings with participants to ensure accuracy and alignment with field conditions.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

Based on data obtained through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis, three major themes emerged: (1) principal's leadership strategies in improving teacher performance, (2) effectiveness of conflict management, and (3) strengthening organizational culture. The findings are presented thematically in alignment with the qualitative case study design.

Principal's Leadership Strategies in Improving Teacher Performance

The analysis of interview transcripts and observation notes indicates that the principal of SMP Negeri 35 Palembang applies three main leadership strategies: continuous professional development, motivational reinforcement, and participatory collaboration.

First, continuous professional development is implemented through structured academic supervision, internal training sessions, peer mentoring, and reflective performance evaluations. Observational data from supervision sessions show that the principal provides constructive feedback and facilitates follow-up discussions rather than merely conducting formal assessments. Document analysis of teacher performance reports further confirms that supervision results are used as a basis for individualized improvement plans.

Second, teacher motivation is strengthened through recognition mechanisms, equitable task distribution based on teacher competence, and support for instructional innovation. Teachers reported in interviews that acknowledgment during meetings and opportunities to lead projects increased their professional confidence. Observations during school assemblies also show public appreciation of teacher achievements.

Third, participatory collaboration is reflected in regular coordination meetings and reflection forums. Teachers are encouraged to share ideas, provide input on school programs, and participate in decision-making processes. Meeting minutes demonstrate that teacher suggestions are formally documented and considered in policy adjustments.

Effectiveness of Conflict Management

Data from interviews reveal that conflicts among teachers or between teachers and administrators are addressed through open dialogue, mediation, and consensus-building. The principal applies a collaborative approach by inviting involved parties to express perspectives

before reaching mutual agreements. Observation during teacher meetings indicates that discussions are facilitated in a structured and respectful manner.

Preventive strategies were also identified. Weekly reflection forums serve as platforms for early identification of potential misunderstandings. Document analysis of internal regulations shows established procedures for handling disputes, emphasizing communication and reconciliation rather than punitive measures.

Strengthening Organizational Culture

Observational data indicate that the school promotes three dominant values: integrity, collaboration, and innovation. These values are consistently reinforced through daily routines, assemblies, and professional development programs.

Integrity is reflected in punctuality, accountability in administrative reporting, and adherence to school regulations. Collaboration is demonstrated through teamwork in lesson planning and cross-subject coordination. Innovation is encouraged by supporting teachers in implementing digital learning tools and conducting classroom action research. Interview responses confirm that these shared values shape teachers' professional attitudes and interactions.

Relationship among Leadership, Conflict Management, and Organizational Culture

Thematic analysis suggests an interconnection among participatory leadership, collaborative conflict management, and value-based organizational culture. Leadership practices that emphasize openness create space for constructive conflict resolution. Effective conflict management strengthens trust, while shared cultural values sustain collaborative behavior. Collectively, these elements contribute to observable improvements in teacher discipline, cooperation, and instructional creativity.

Discussion

The findings of this qualitative case study demonstrate that the principal's leadership practices significantly influence teacher performance through integrated strategies of professional development, participatory decision-making, and motivational reinforcement. The participatory approach identified in this study aligns with transformational and distributed leadership perspectives, which emphasize shared vision and collective engagement in school improvement (Leithwood et al., 2019). In-depth interview data confirm that teachers perceive involvement in decision-making as a form of professional empowerment, supporting the argument that participative leadership enhances organizational commitment and instructional quality.

The implementation of continuous professional development through supervision and mentoring reflects instructional leadership characteristics. According to Darling-Hammond et al. (2017), sustained professional learning opportunities are strongly associated with improved teaching practices and student outcomes. In this case, supervision functions not

merely as evaluation but as formative guidance, reinforcing the view that effective leaders act as facilitators of teacher growth rather than controllers of performance.

Regarding conflict management, the collaborative and dialogical strategies observed in this study are consistent with Rahim's (2021) integrative conflict management model, which emphasizes open communication, mutual respect, and problem-solving orientation. The data indicate that conflict is treated as a constructive process rather than a disruptive force. This supports the argument that properly managed conflict can strengthen trust and professional relationships within organizations.

The reinforcement of integrity, collaboration, and innovation as core cultural values reflects Schein's (2020) theory that shared assumptions and values guide organizational behavior. In SMP Negeri 35 Palembang, these values are not only articulated symbolically but embedded in daily practices, which enhances cultural consistency and stability. A strong organizational culture, as suggested by prior research, provides behavioral norms that sustain performance improvements.

However, the findings also need to be interpreted contextually. Previous studies indicate that participatory leadership does not automatically yield positive results if organizational members lack trust or if communication structures are weak (Rahman & Hidayat, 2020). Similarly, Nguyen et al. (2019) argue that collaborative conflict management requires emotional competence and institutional support to function effectively. The effectiveness observed in this study may therefore be influenced by contextual factors such as school size, leadership personality, and organizational climate.

Overall, this case study highlights that leadership effectiveness emerges from the consistent integration of participatory decision-making, constructive conflict management, and value-based organizational culture. Rather than functioning independently, these elements operate synergistically to enhance teacher performance within the specific institutional context.

4. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the principal's transformational-participative leadership strategy at SMP Negeri 35 Palembang plays a significant role in supporting teacher performance through the integration of collaborative conflict management and the strengthening of organizational culture. The findings indicate that teacher performance improvement is facilitated through continuous professional development, reinforcement of motivation, and active teacher involvement in decision-making processes. Conflict management is implemented constructively through open communication, mediation, and consensus-building, which helps maintain positive professional relationships within the school. Furthermore, the internalization of core values such as integrity, collaboration, and innovation contributes to the development of a supportive and cohesive work environment. The study also reveals an interrelated relationship among leadership practices, conflict management, and organizational culture, where participatory leadership fosters open communication, effective conflict management strengthens mutual trust, and a positive organizational culture enhances professional commitment. Collectively, these elements contribute to improved teacher discipline, cooperation, and instructional creativity. Overall, this study affirms that leadership effectiveness depends on the consistent and integrated

implementation of participatory leadership strategies, constructive conflict resolution, and value-based cultural development within the school context.

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