

Principal-Teacher Communication in Curriculum Development

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Abstract: This study examines principal-teacher communication in curriculum development, focusing on: communication patterns used by the principal, teachers' roles in planning, implementing, and evaluating the curriculum, and the relationship between communication quality and teacher participation motivated by uneven teacher involvement in Merdeka Curriculum development despite existing communication channels. A descriptive qualitative design with an axiological orientation was employed to examine ethical, normative, and practical values reflected in principal-teacher communication. Data were collected through interviews, observation, and documentation involving eight informants: the principal, vice principal for curriculum, administrative staff, and five teachers. Analysis followed reduction, display, conclusion drawing, and verification. Findings reveal combinative communication integrating formal channels (coordination meetings, supervision) and informal channels (personal discussions, WhatsApp groups). However, dialogue openness was unevenly experienced, and follow-up on teacher input required strengthening. Teachers participated in planning, implementation, and evaluation, but engagement varied some demonstrated initiative in literacy, religious, and character-building activities, while others awaited direct instruction. This study uniquely integrates axiological analysis with communication patterns in curriculum development within the Merdeka Curriculum context. Clear, open, appreciative, and consistently followed-up communication strengthens teacher participation and supports collaborative curriculum development. This research contributes empirical evidence that communication quality, reinforced through interpersonal trust, Leader-Member Exchange, and intrinsic motivation, is pivotal for fostering equitable teacher engagement in curriculum reform, offering actionable insights for primary school leaders.

Keywords: Curriculum Development, Merdeka Curriculum, Primary School, Principal Communication, Teachers' Role

A. Introduction

Curriculum development in primary schools requires collaborative leadership because the curriculum is not only a written document but also a set of learning practices implemented by teachers in classrooms (Moti & Mekonnen, 2023). The

principal plays a strategic role in translating school policy, building shared understanding, and encouraging teachers to contribute to curriculum planning, implementation, and evaluation (Bergmark et al., 2021). In the context of the Merdeka Curriculum, this role becomes more important because teachers are expected to adapt learning tools, design contextual activities, and reflect on students' needs.

At SD Negeri 119 Palembang, curriculum development has been carried out through the preparation of the school curriculum document, teacher coordination, literacy activities, religious activities, classroom-based learning innovation, and informal communication through digital groups. However, the research problem emerged from the fact that teacher participation was not yet fully even. Some teachers were active and innovative, while others tended to wait for instruction from the principal or more senior teachers (Chua et al., 2020). This condition indicates that the main issue is not the absence of communication, but the quality of communication. Communication in school management should not stop at giving instructions. It should include listening, dialogue, feedback, appreciation, and systematic follow-up. When teachers feel heard and respected, they are more likely to participate actively in curriculum development. When their suggestions are not documented or followed up, their willingness to contribute may decline. Based on this problem, this article aims to describe principal-teacher communication in curriculum development, explain teachers' roles in developing the curriculum, and analyze how communication quality relates to teacher participation. The study is expected to provide practical insight for strengthening dialogic, appreciative, and collaborative communication in primary school curriculum management (Sun, 2025).



Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of Principal-Teacher Communication in Curriculum Development

B. Methods

This research used a descriptive qualitative approach with an axiological orientation. The descriptive qualitative approach was used to understand the communication process between the principal and teachers in curriculum development, while the axiological orientation was used to examine ethical values, norms, and practical values reflected in the communication practices. Through this orientation, the study did not only describe communication patterns, but also interpreted whether the

communication showed openness, appreciation, fairness, feedback, and meaningful follow-up in supporting teachers' roles in curriculum development. The study was conducted at SD Negeri 119 Palembang, located at Jalan Gotong Royong RT 04 Km 12, Sukodadi, Sukarami District, Palembang, South Sumatra. The object of the study was the communication process between the principal and teachers and the role of teachers in curriculum development. The informants consisted of eight participants: the principal, vice principal for curriculum, administrative staff, and five teachers. These informants were selected because they represented managerial, administrative, and classroom perspectives in the school. The principal was the key informant because of her role in managing communication and directing curriculum development, while teachers were the main informants because they implemented the curriculum directly in the classroom (Mackay et al., 2025).

Data were collected through interviews, observation, and documentation. Interviews explored the experiences of the principal and teachers regarding communication, participation, and curriculum development. Observation was used to examine communication practices in school activities, including meetings and informal interaction. Documentation was used to examine school curriculum documents, meeting notes, attendance lists, and program documentation. The data were analyzed through four stages: data reduction, data display, conclusion drawing, and verification. Data reduction focused on selecting information related to principal-teacher communication, teacher involvement, and curriculum development. Data display was conducted through narrative description and matrices. Conclusion drawing and verification were carried out by comparing interviews, observation notes, and documentation so that the findings were supported by multiple sources of evidence (Cloutier & Ravasi, 2021). The profile of research informants is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Research Informants

No.	Code	Position	Education	Role in the Study
1	KS	Principal	S2	Key informant; main source for principal communication patterns
2	WK	Vice Principal for Curriculum	S1	Supporting informant; managerial and curriculum triangulation
3	TU	Administrative Staff	S1	Supporting informant; administrative and document triangulation
4	G1	Class II Teacher	S1	Main informant; active in classroom and literacy innovation
5	G2	Class V Teacher	S1	Main informant; tends to need encouragement
6	G3	Class IV Teacher	S1	Main informant; active and communicative
7	G4	Class V Teacher	S1	Main informant; active in implementation, less active in planning
8	G5	Islamic Education Teacher	S1	Main informant; active in religious and character-building programs

The data collection and analysis procedures are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. Data Collection and Analysis Matrix

Technique	Source/Activity	Focus of Data	Use in Analysis
Interview	Principal, vice principal, administrative staff, and teachers	Communication patterns, teacher participation, curriculum development practices	Main basis for thematic findings
Observation	Meetings, informal interaction, school activities, and curriculum-related practices	Formal and informal communication, teacher initiatives, program implementation	Triangulation of interview findings
Documentation	Curriculum documents, meeting notes, attendance lists, and school program documentation	Evidence of planning, coordination, and follow-up	Verification of data consistency
Data Analysis	Reduction, display, conclusion drawing, and verification	Themes related to communication, teacher role, and curriculum development	Construction of finding matrix and conclusion

C. Results and Discussion

The results are presented according to the three research focuses: principal-teacher communication, teachers' roles in curriculum development, and the relationship between communication and teacher participation. The presentation of results is separated from the discussion so that the empirical findings can be read clearly before being interpreted conceptually (Berends & Deken, 2021).

Principal-Teacher Communication Pattern

The first finding shows that principal-teacher communication was combinative. The principal used formal communication through coordination meetings, official directions, supervision, and school documents. At the same time, informal communication was also used through casual conversations, personal consultation, and WhatsApp groups. This combination allowed information to move through official and practical channels. Formal meetings were used to discuss policy, curriculum administration, learning programs, and school agendas, while informal communication was used to clarify instructions and respond to daily classroom needs. The data show that the principal did not rely on a single communication channel. In several school activities, information was delivered through meetings and was then reinforced through informal conversation or digital reminders. This pattern helped teachers remember deadlines, understand school expectations, and coordinate activities more quickly. The WhatsApp group was especially useful for daily coordination because teachers could receive information even outside formal meeting times (Costa-sánchez & Guerrero-pico, 2020). However, the findings also show that the availability of communication channels did not automatically create equal openness among teachers. Some teachers were comfortable expressing ideas, asking questions, and giving feedback. Other teachers tended to be quiet, waited for direction, or only responded when directly asked. This means that communication

openness existed structurally because the school provided forums and channels, but it had not yet become an evenly shared culture among all teachers (Chao, 2022).

The clarity of information from the principal generally helped teachers understand what needed to be prepared for curriculum-related activities. Teachers understood the importance of lesson planning, learning implementation, literacy programs, and school-based activities. However, some information still required repeated explanation, especially when it related to curriculum administration, teaching modules, or follow-up tasks after meetings. This indicates that clear communication should be supported by written notes, clear task division, and regular monitoring (Kasneci et al., 2023). The feedback process was also found to be present but still limited. The principal provided feedback in supervision and meetings, but the feedback was not always continuous. Some teacher input was heard during discussions, but not all input was recorded in detail or followed up through a clear action plan. As a result, several teachers perceived that communication had already occurred, but the continuity from suggestion to action needed improvement. From observation and documentation, formal communication was visible in coordination meetings, meeting notes, attendance lists, and school program documentation. Informal communication appeared in daily interactions and digital coordination. These findings indicate that the principal had built a communication structure, but the next challenge was to strengthen the quality of dialogue, documentation, and follow-up (Kaltoft et al., 2022).

Teachers' Roles in Curriculum Development

The second finding shows that teachers were involved in curriculum development through planning, implementation, and evaluation. In the planning stage, teachers participated in preparing learning tools, teaching modules, learning objectives, and school programs. Several teachers contributed ideas during meetings and adjusted learning activities to students' needs. The involvement of teachers in planning was important because the curriculum would be more relevant when classroom experiences were included in the planning process (Grecu, 2023). Teacher participation in planning, however, was not evenly distributed. Some teachers were active in providing ideas and developing learning materials. Others tended to follow existing directions and waited for instruction from the principal or curriculum team. The data suggest that planning activities were available, but the school still needed a mechanism that ensured each teacher had a space to contribute. Without such a mechanism, the same active teachers may continue to dominate, while quieter teachers remain passive. In the implementation stage, teachers carried out curriculum programs through classroom learning, literacy activities, religious activities, character-building activities, and other school initiatives. The Class II teacher showed initiative through literacy-related activities, including the use of a reading corner. The Islamic Education teacher contributed through religious and character-building

programs. Other teachers supported learning implementation according to their grade levels and classroom responsibilities (Moundridou et al., 2024).

The implementation stage showed that teachers were not merely administrative actors. Some teachers became curriculum developers at the classroom level by adapting learning activities, creating learning routines, and encouraging student participation. These classroom-based initiatives indicate that curriculum development occurred not only at the level of official documents, but also through daily pedagogical decisions made by teachers (Choi & Prasad, 2024). In the evaluation stage, teachers were involved in reflection and discussion about curriculum implementation. They provided input on student readiness, learning resources, classroom constraints, and program effectiveness. Evaluation was usually carried out through meetings and informal discussions. However, the findings show that evaluation still needed stronger documentation and clearer follow-up. Teacher reflections would be more useful if they were recorded, grouped into priority issues, and translated into improvement plans (Zeng, 2020). The most important pattern in teacher participation was the difference between active and passive teachers. Active teachers showed initiative, confidence, and willingness to innovate. Passive teachers tended to wait for direct instruction and required encouragement before contributing. Intrinsic motivation became a key factor in this difference. Teachers who saw curriculum development as part of professional responsibility were more willing to act, while teachers with lower confidence needed more personal support from the principal (Haug & Mork, 2021). Observational evidence is presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Observational Evidence of Communication and Curriculum Development Practices

Observed Evidence	Description	Meaning for the Study	Interpretive Note
Coordination meetings	Formal meetings were used to deliver school policies, curriculum directions, and program agendas.	Shows the existence of formal communication structure.	Needs stronger two-way participation and documentation of teacher input.
Digital communication	WhatsApp groups were used for reminders, clarification, and practical daily coordination.	Shows flexible informal communication.	Effective for speed, but not enough for deep curriculum reflection.
Curriculum documents	School curriculum documents and administrative records supported planning and coordination.	Shows that curriculum development was documented at the institutional level.	Documentation needs to be linked with teacher reflection and follow-up.
Literacy initiative	Reading corner and literacy activities reflected teacher initiative in classroom-based curriculum implementation.	Shows active teacher role in implementing curriculum programs.	Good practice that can be shared with other teachers.
Religious and character activities	Religious activities were planned and implemented by the Islamic Education teacher.	Shows curriculum implementation beyond classroom academic content.	Can strengthen character education and school culture.

Relationship between Communication and Teacher Participation

The third finding shows a positive relationship between principal-teacher communication and teachers' roles in curriculum development. Teachers who experienced clearer and more open communication tended to be more active in planning, implementing, and evaluating curriculum activities. They were also more confident in asking questions, sharing ideas, and carrying out school programs. Clear communication helped teachers understand what was expected from them (Dowd, 2021). When the principal explained curriculum tasks, program objectives, and learning administration clearly, teachers were more able to prepare learning tools and participate in school activities. This clarity reduced confusion and helped teachers connect school policy with classroom practice. Open communication encouraged teachers to feel that their ideas mattered. Teachers who felt invited to speak were more likely to give input and develop initiatives. In contrast, teachers who did not feel confident or did not believe that their input would be followed up tended to participate less. This shows that teacher involvement depends not only on formal assignment but also on psychological safety and interpersonal trust (Xu et al., 2022).

Appreciative communication also influenced teacher participation. When the principal recognized teacher efforts, teachers became more motivated to continue contributing. Appreciation did not always have to be formal; simple recognition, supportive feedback, and attention to teacher ideas were meaningful. These forms of communication strengthened confidence and intrinsic motivation. The relationship between communication and teacher participation was not direct in a mechanical way. It was mediated by interpersonal trust and intrinsic motivation. Teachers who trusted the principal and felt respected were more willing to share ideas. Teachers with stronger intrinsic motivation were more able to sustain innovation even when challenges occurred. Therefore, communication quality must be supported by a school culture that values trust, respect, and professional responsibility (Fisher, 2021). This finding can also be explained through the perspective of Leader-Member Exchange. In this study, teachers who had stronger communication quality with the principal tended to show higher confidence, initiative, and willingness to participate in curriculum development. They received clearer information, felt more trusted, and were more willing to share ideas during planning, implementation, and evaluation. In contrast, teachers whose communication with the principal was more limited tended to wait for direct instruction and showed lower participation. This indicates that the quality of principal-teacher exchange influences the extent to which teachers feel valued and motivated to contribute to curriculum development.

The summary of research findings is shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Summary Matrix of Research Findings

Research Focus	Main Findings	Condition	Evidence
Principal-teacher communication	Communication was combinative, using formal and informal channels. Information was generally clear, but open dialogue and feedback were not evenly experienced by all teachers.	Adequate but needs improvement	Interviews with KS, WK, TU, and teachers; meeting observation; meeting notes
Teachers' role in curriculum development	Teachers participated in planning, implementation, and evaluation. Participation was uneven; active teachers showed initiative, while passive teachers depended on instruction.	Running but uneven	Interviews, school activity observation, documentation of programs and meetings
Relationship between communication and teacher role	Clear, open, and appreciative communication encouraged teacher participation. Interpersonal trust and intrinsic motivation mediated the relationship.	Positive relationship found	Triangulated interview, observation, and documentation data

Discussion

This section interprets the findings by explaining what they mean for school communication, curriculum management, and teacher participation. The discussion is separated from the results to avoid mixing empirical description with conceptual interpretation.

Communication as a Management Process

The findings indicate that principal-teacher communication functioned as a management process that connected school policy with classroom practice. The principal used meetings to explain formal expectations, but informal communication made those expectations more practical and accessible. This combination is important because curriculum development requires both institutional direction and daily problem-solving. Formal communication gives legitimacy, while informal communication gives flexibility (Yordanova et al., 2025). However, the study also shows that communication structure is not enough. A school may have meetings, groups, and official documents, but teachers may still be passive if they do not feel psychologically safe to speak. The gap between structural openness and cultural openness is therefore a central issue. Structural openness means that a forum exists; cultural openness means that every teacher feels comfortable using the forum. The school had begun to build structural openness, but cultural openness still needed strengthening (Niemi, 2021).

The limited follow-up of teacher input is also significant. In curriculum development, feedback must move beyond verbal discussion. Teacher suggestions need to be documented, reviewed, and connected to action. Without follow-up, communication may be perceived as symbolic rather than transformative. This can weaken teacher motivation because teachers may feel that their ideas are heard but not used. For this reason, principal communication should be understood as a cycle: delivering information, inviting response, documenting input, acting on selected suggestions, and reporting progress back to teachers. This cycle can transform communication from one-way instruction into collaborative curriculum governance (Quew-jones & Quew-jones, 2022).

Teacher Participation as Uneven Professional Agency

The study found that teachers had participated in curriculum development, but the participation was uneven. This finding is important because it shows that teacher involvement cannot be measured only by attendance in meetings or completion of administrative tasks. Real participation is shown through initiative, reflection, creativity, and willingness to improve learning practice. Active teachers demonstrated professional agency. They did not only wait for policy but translated curriculum expectations into classroom activities, literacy practices, and character-building programs. These teachers became practical curriculum developers because they connected school plans with the actual needs of students (König et al., 2020). Their initiatives show that curriculum development is an everyday professional practice, not merely a document prepared at the beginning of the school year. Passive teachers, on the other hand, were not necessarily unwilling to participate. Their passivity may be related to confidence, habit, lack of encouragement, or the perception that decisions are made by leaders and active teachers. This means that increasing participation requires more than instruction. The principal needs to use mentoring, small task assignments, supportive feedback, and appreciation to gradually build teacher confidence (Chea, 2024).

Intrinsic motivation emerged as the strongest difference between active and passive teachers. Teachers with stronger intrinsic motivation tended to interpret curriculum work as part of their professional calling. Teachers with weaker motivation needed external support. Therefore, communication strategies should be differentiated. Active teachers need autonomy and recognition, while passive teachers need guidance and safe opportunities to contribute (Könings et al., 2021).

Principal Communication and Curriculum Development

The relationship between principal communication and teacher participation can be explained through three mechanisms. First, clear communication creates understanding. Teachers need to understand what the curriculum requires, what the school expects, and what tasks must be completed. Without clarity, teachers may

become confused or may only complete administrative work without understanding its purpose (Eisenbach & Frydman, 2023).

Second, open communication creates ownership. When teachers are invited to discuss and contribute, they begin to see curriculum development as a shared responsibility rather than a principal-driven program. Ownership is essential because teachers are the actors who translate curriculum into learning activities. A curriculum will not be sustainable if teachers only implement orders without feeling involved in the process. Third, appreciative communication creates motivation. Teachers are more likely to maintain participation when their efforts are recognized. Appreciation strengthens confidence and makes teachers feel that their contribution has value. In this study, appreciation and interpersonal trust were important because they influenced whether teachers felt comfortable speaking and innovating (Olmos-vega et al., 2023).

The findings also show that the relationship between communication and participation is mediated by interpersonal trust. Trust is created when the principal listens seriously, treats teachers fairly, and follows up on input. Without trust, teachers may attend meetings but remain silent. With trust, teachers become more willing to share classroom problems and suggest solutions. Therefore, curriculum development should be managed through a communication model that is dialogic, appreciative, and accountable. Dialogic means that teachers are invited to speak. Appreciative means that teacher contributions are recognized. Accountable means that input is documented and followed up. These three elements can help the school move from routine coordination to collaborative curriculum improvement (Admiraal et al., 2021).

Practical Implications for School Management

The findings suggest several practical implications. First, the principal should redesign meetings so that they are not only used to deliver information. Meetings should include structured teacher-sharing sessions, problem identification, solution planning, and follow-up review. Each teacher should have an opportunity to speak, even briefly, so that participation does not depend only on the most active teachers. Second, the school needs a simple documentation system for teacher input. Suggestions can be recorded in meeting minutes, grouped by priority, and reviewed in the next meeting. This system will show teachers that their ideas are taken seriously and will help the principal monitor which suggestions have been implemented (Selvaraj et al., 2021). Third, the principal should use personal mentoring for passive teachers. Passive teachers may need smaller tasks, direct encouragement, and gradual opportunities to lead small activities. This strategy can reduce participation gaps and prevent curriculum development from being carried only by a few active teachers. Fourth, curriculum evaluation should become a regular reflective practice. Evaluation should not only check administrative completeness but also explore classroom problems, student learning needs, resource limitations, and teacher support needs. Reflection will be more useful when the school connects it with specific improvement

plans. Finally, a culture of appreciation needs to be strengthened. Appreciation can be given through positive feedback, recognition in meetings, opportunities to share good practices, or assignment as a small program coordinator (Ndubuisi et al., 2022). Such appreciation can strengthen teacher confidence and intrinsic motivation. The recommended improvement model is presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Recommended Improvement Model for Communication and Curriculum Development

Problem Found	Recommended Action	Expected Output	Responsible Actor
Dialogue is not evenly experienced by all teachers	Create structured discussion sessions and invite each teacher to share brief input.	More equal teacher participation.	Principal and vice principal.
Teacher input is not always followed up	Record suggestions in meeting minutes and set follow-up targets.	Clearer accountability and continuity.	Principal, curriculum team, and administrative staff.
Some teachers remain passive	Provide individual mentoring and appreciation for small contributions.	Improved confidence and intrinsic motivation.	Principal and senior teachers.
Curriculum evaluation is not fully systematic	Conduct regular reflection meetings focused on learning problems and improvement plans.	Sustainable curriculum improvement.	Principal and all teachers.
Good practices are not yet shared widely	Create teacher-sharing sessions for literacy, religious, and classroom innovation practices.	Replication of effective practices across classrooms.	Curriculum team and active teachers.

D. Conclusions

Based on the research findings, this study conclusively establishes that principal-teacher communication plays a central role in strengthening curriculum development in primary schools, operating through a combinative approach that integrates both formal channels meetings, official coordination, supervision, and curriculum discussions and informal channels such as personal conversations and WhatsApp groups. This combination enables the principal to effectively deliver information, coordinate programs, and maintain daily interaction with teachers. However, the study reveals that communication openness is not equally experienced; while some teachers confidently share ideas, ask questions, and propose improvements, others remain passive and await direct instructions, indicating that the existence of communication channels does not automatically guarantee meaningful participation. Teacher involvement spans planning (contributing to learning tools, modules, and school programs), implementation (conducting classroom activities, literacy, religious, and character-building initiatives), and evaluation (providing reflections and suggestions on curriculum practice). Yet, participation remains uneven: active teachers demonstrate initiative, creativity, and professional responsibility, while passive teachers require more guidance and encouragement, with intrinsic motivation

emerging as a key differentiating factor. Overall, clear, open, appreciative, and consistently followed-up communication significantly strengthens teachers' roles in curriculum development. Practically, principals must intentionally cultivate a communication culture that balances formal coordination with informal dialogue, personalized mentoring, authentic appreciation, and systematic follow-up. Teacher input should be documented, discussed, and translated into actionable improvements, ensuring that teachers feel valued and become increasingly willing to participate. This approach fosters collaborative, classroom-responsive, and sustainable curriculum development within the framework of school-based educational management. For future research, it is recommended to investigate the specific factors that differentiate active from passive teachers such as self-efficacy, years of experience, or prior supervision history to inform targeted interventions. Comparative studies across schools with varying communication cultures would reveal contextual best practices. Longitudinal designs could track how sustained communication strategies influence teacher participation and curriculum outcomes over time, while qualitative case studies exploring teachers' lived experiences would provide richer insights into the barriers and enablers of open dialogue. Additionally, action research involving principals and teachers in co-designing communication protocols could generate contextually responsive solutions and enhance ownership of curriculum development processes.

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