

Principal Leadership Management in Improving Teacher's Performance

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Abstract: This study aims to describe and analyze the leadership management of school principals in improving teacher performance at SD Negeri 01 Tanjung Kukuh through four management stages: planning, implementation, evaluation, and follow-up. A descriptive qualitative approach was employed. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with principals and teachers, participatory observation of leadership behavior and teaching performance, and documentation studies of learning tools and supervision reports. Analysis followed Miles and Huberman's interactive model, encompassing data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Findings reveal that: (1) planning is conducted collaboratively, involving teachers in vision formulation and supervision scheduling; (2) implementation occurs through technical guidance, motivational awards, and exemplary principal discipline; (3) evaluation is carried out via periodic clinical supervision to monitor alignment between lesson plans and classroom practice; and (4) follow-up is realized by facilitating teachers' sustainable professional development through workshops and teacher working groups (KKG) to address identified obstacles. This study provides a holistic, stage-by-stage model of integrated leadership management in a rural elementary context, an approach rarely documented in Indonesian school leadership literature. Findings offer a replicable framework for principals seeking to systematically enhance teacher professionalism through structured, participatory, and reflective management practices. This research contributes empirical evidence that integrated leadership management across all four stages effectively improves teacher performance, demonstrating that collaborative planning, supportive implementation, clinical evaluation, and targeted follow-up are mutually reinforcing strategies for sustainable educational quality improvement.

Keywords: Management Leadership, Principal Leadership, Teacher's Performance

A. Introduction

Global developments in the 21st century have placed the quality of education as a primary determinant in enhancing human resource competitiveness amidst the dynamics of the Industrial Revolution 4.0 and Society 5.0 (Ikenga & van der Sijde, 2024). Education is no longer merely oriented toward knowledge transfer, but rather

toward developing critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and communication skills. Therefore, educational institutions are required to adapt to these changes by continuously improving the quality of learning. Several recent studies have shown that the quality of education is significantly influenced by school leadership and teacher professionalism in managing learning (Amelia et al., 2022; Hallinger, 2020). In this context, elementary schools, as the foundation of education, play a crucial role in shaping the character and core competencies of students. Therefore, improving the quality of basic education is a priority agenda that cannot be ignored.

Elementary education in Indonesia serves as the most important foundation for shaping the character, knowledge, and skills of the nation's young generation. By the end of 2025, the implementation of the independent curriculum will have entered a national consolidation phase, where schools are required to truly implement student-centered, project-based learning that is oriented toward strengthening the profile of Pancasila students. In this context, the principal's role is no longer merely administrative but rather that of a management leader who determines the success or failure of educational transformation in their respective educational units. However, not all schools face the same conditions. In rural and agrarian areas, the challenges faced are far more complex due to limited infrastructure, transportation access, human resources, and the socio-economic impacts of communities still heavily dependent on the seasonal agricultural sector.

One clear example of this is SD Negeri 01 Tanjung Kukuh, with NPSN 10606173, located in Tanjung Kukuh Village, West Semendawai District, East Ogan Komering Ulu Regency, South Sumatra Province. This school was founded on July 17, 1990, and as of 2025 still holds a C accreditation status (since 2014), with an enrollment of approximately 68 students and only 12 active teachers, according to the latest Dapodik data. This school perfectly represents the thousands of public elementary schools in Indonesia's agrarian regions that continue to struggle amidst limitations. Its location is prone to seasonal flooding and inadequate road access, and the majority of parents are farmers and farm laborers, making the educational process often hampered by external factors that are difficult to control. However, the biggest challenge comes from within the school itself, namely the principal's suboptimal leadership management in motivating and improving teacher's performance.

Internal school data for the second semester of the 2024/2025 academic year shows that the average teacher's performance was only 68%, far below the East OKU district average of 75%. Forty percent of teachers reported difficulties implementing the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project (P5) due to a lack of technical guidance and regular academic supervision from the principal. An internal satisfaction survey also noted that only 50% of teachers felt adequately supported by school leadership, particularly in terms of two-way communication, motivation, and recognition for achievements. This situation is exacerbated by several concrete issues that have plagued schools in recent years. Excessive administrative burdens, multi-teacher

workloads (one teacher teaching multiple subjects simultaneously), high teacher absenteeism rates reaching 14% per semester, and prolonged post-pandemic burnout are factors that continue to depress teacher's performance. Furthermore, the legacy of community distrust in school management following allegations of misappropriation of School Operational Assistance (BOS) funds in 2023, which were reported by local media (Postnews TV, 2023), has strained relations with schools, parents, and the school committee. Consequently, parent participation in school activities, including extracurricular activities like Scouting, has been very low.

The knock-on effects of this low teacher's performance are clearly evident in student achievement. The average score for sixth-grade final exams in 2024 was only 74, still below the minimum target set by South Sumatra Province. While the P5 program has significant potential to increase student engagement and integrate the values of mutual cooperation typical of agrarian communities, without the full support of motivated and well-trained teachers, the program has been largely unsuccessful. In efforts to improve educational quality, the principal plays a management role as an instructional leader, serving not only as an administrator but also as the primary driver of the learning process. Instructional leadership emphasizes the principal's ability to systematically design, direct, and evaluate learning practices. Recent research has shown that effective principal leadership contributes significantly to improving teaching quality and student learning outcomes (Leithwood, 2021; Pardosi & Utari, 2022). Principals are required to create a conducive academic culture, provide constructive supervision, and facilitate continuous teacher professional development (Abbaspour et al., 2024). Therefore, appropriate leadership management is a key factor in optimizing teacher's performance in the school environment (Sariakin et al., 2025).

Teacher's performance is a crucial element in determining the success of the educational process because teachers play a direct role in implementing the curriculum in the classroom (Maqbool et al., 2024; Wahyu et al., 2021). Teacher's performance encompasses aspects of lesson planning, lesson implementation, evaluation of learning outcomes, and continuous professional development. Various empirical studies have shown that improved teacher's performance has a direct impact on the quality of learning and student learning outcomes (Engida et al., 2024; Nurabadi et al., 2021). However, in practice, various obstacles still hinder the optimization of teacher's performance, such as low learning innovation, limited pedagogical competency, and a lack of motivation for self-development. Therefore, management intervention from school principals is needed to encourage systematic and sustainable teacher's performance improvement (Alzoraiki et al., 2023).

All of these problems essentially stem from one central issue: the principal's suboptimal leadership management in guiding, motivating, and empowering teachers amidst very specific and multi-layered challenges. Yet, the principal has considerable authority and autonomy to develop a shared vision, conduct scheduled and meaningful academic supervision, create an inclusive school culture, and foster

close collaboration with the school committee and the local community. Empirically, conditions at SD Negeri 01 Tanjung Kukuh indicate issues related to teacher's performance. Some identified phenomena include teachers' lack of discipline in carrying out their duties, limitations in developing innovative learning management, and suboptimal use of technology in the learning process. Furthermore, teachers' pedagogical competence in designing student-centered learning still needs improvement. This situation indicates that the principal's role in providing direction, coaching, and supervision is not yet fully effective. These findings align with recent research showing a gap between education policy and its implementation at the school level (Suyanto, 2023).

The gap between the ideal concept of educational leadership and practice in the field is an important research gap that requires further in-depth study. Theoretically, instructional leadership is believed to be able to improve teacher's performance and learning quality, but in reality, the implementation of this management often faces various contextual obstacles (Cansoy et al., 2025). Therefore, this research, entitled "Principal Leadership Management in Improving Teacher's performance at SD Negeri 01 Tanjung Kukuh," is highly relevant and urgent to be carried out in 2025. This research specifically focuses on principal leadership management as the main independent variable that includes a transformational approach (building vision and motivation), situational (adapting style to teacher needs), and collaborative (involving teachers, committees, and parents) towards teacher's performance as the dependent variable measured through four main dimensions: pedagogical, professional, personality, and social. By using a qualitative approach through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and analysis of school documents, this study not only aims to describe existing conditions, but also to produce leadership management recommendations that are prescriptive, practical, and can be directly replicated in dozens of other public elementary schools in West Semendawai District and the East OKU region as a whole.

The novelty of this research lies in its in-depth exploration of leadership practices in rural public elementary schools with low accreditation during the transition to the Independent Curriculum, a topic rarely focused on by previous studies. This research will also yield an adaptive leadership model that integrates local values of agrarian communities, such as mutual cooperation and deliberation, into daily school management, a highly contextual and underexplored approach. Ultimately, this research is expected to be a catalyst for real change in improving the quality of basic education in underdeveloped regions. By strengthening principal leadership, teacher's performance will improve, learning will become more meaningful, student achievement will be boosted, and schools will be able to make a greater contribution to the competitiveness of the nation's children from agrarian regions. This is both the urgency and the commitment of this research by the end of 2025.

B. Methods

This research was conducted at Tanjung Kukuh 01 Public Elementary School, administratively located in Tanjung Kukuh Village, West Semendawai District, East Ogan Komering Ulu Regency, South Sumatra Province. This location was chosen purposively, considering that the school is one of the public elementary schools in an agrarian region undergoing transformation to implement the Independent Curriculum, offering unique leadership dynamics worthy of in-depth study. The research period, from December 2025 to March 2026, spanned the planning and preparation stages, data collection, data analysis, and final report preparation. This four-month period was deemed sufficient to achieve data saturation in qualitative research, given that the researcher would be directly involved and interacting intensively with the subjects in the field. The primary focus or object of this research is "The principal's leadership management in improving teacher's performance at Tanjung Kukuh 01 Public Elementary School." The selection of this subject was motivated by the urgency of gaining a holistic and contextual understanding of how school principals carry out their managerial and supervisory functions amidst the challenges of limited resources and the demands of a new curriculum.

This research deliberately does not measure causal relationships quantitatively but rather seeks to explore the meaning behind the actions, policies, and social interactions between principals and teachers, making a qualitative approach the most appropriate choice. Therefore, this study employed a qualitative approach with descriptive qualitative methods, which aimed to identify, assess, and comprehensively understand managerial issues and manage leadership strategies effectively based on the natural internal conditions of the organization. In qualitative research, the researcher acts as the primary instrument (human instrument), tasked with collecting, interpreting, and analyzing data directly in the field. This central role requires the researcher to be physically present amidst school activities, from flag ceremonies and classroom learning to teacher coordination meetings, to fully capture the nuances of work culture and organizational climate. Despite acting as a key instrument, the researcher still requires tools to support the operationalization of data collection, particularly to maintain consistency and systematic recording of information.

The tools are arranged in the form of semi-structured interview guidelines, participatory observation sheets, and documentation formats, all of which are developed based on research grids that refer to the problem formulation and theoretical basis of leadership management and teacher's performance. The research procedure was carried out sequentially and systematically in accordance with the characteristics of naturalistic qualitative research, divided into five main stages. The first stage was entering the field and conducting an in-depth orientation and initial description. In this phase, the researcher conducted direct observations of all principal leadership activities and teacher's performance in a completely natural setting, without any intervention or manipulation by the researcher. The researcher described

in detail what the research subjects saw, heard, felt, and experienced through participant observation of daily interactions; open-ended and exploratory initial interviews; and recording available school documents such as the vision and mission and activity schedule.

The second stage was data reduction, which was conducted after a sufficient amount of raw data had been collected from field notes, interview transcripts, activity photographs, and official school documents. At this stage, all information was selected, focused, simplified, and abstracted to only those parts that were truly relevant to the main focus of the research, namely the principal's leadership management and its impact on teacher's performance in the context of the implementation of the Independent Curriculum. Data deemed irrelevant, repetitive, or unsupportive of the analysis was deliberately excluded to ensure the researcher's analytical power remained sharp and focused on the substance of the problem. This reduction process was not carried out in one go, but rather continuously throughout the research process.

The third stage was data selection and grouping through coding and thematic categorization. The reduced data was then broken down into smaller meaningful units, which were then grouped into main themes and sub-themes. Several major themes, established as an initial, yet flexible, analytical framework, included "principal transformational leadership style," "frequency and quality of academic supervision," "motivational programs and reward systems," "local obstacles stemming from geographic and sociocultural factors," and "changes in teacher's performance across pedagogical, professional, personality, and social dimensions." This categorization process was iterative, meaning the researcher periodically returned to the field to check and enrich the data if new themes emerged from the findings.

The fourth stage involves intensive data interpretation and verification through rigorous triangulation. Researchers used source triangulation by comparing and confirming information obtained from the principal, teachers, and school committee. Furthermore, method triangulation was applied by cross-referencing data from in-depth interviews, behavioral observations, and documentation studies to ensure consistency of findings. Researchers also conducted time triangulation by conducting observations over different periods or days, for example, comparing the leadership atmosphere on a typical day with the day of supervision or evaluation meetings. This stage serves as the primary foundation for ensuring the validity, credibility, and transferability of research findings.

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As is customary in qualitative research, the researcher, as the primary instrument, still requires supporting tools to facilitate systematic data collection. These tools were

structured in a semi-structured interview guide containing a list of open-ended questions based on leadership and performance indicators, an observation sheet containing aspects of observed behavior and interactions, and a documentation format used to record administrative and physical school data. These instruments underwent a theoretical review and consultation with educational management experts to ensure the alignment between the questions, indicators, and the research problem formulation. To ensure the validity and credibility of the data, this study applied comprehensive triangulation techniques, extending beyond data collection to analysis. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing and verifying information obtained from various informants (principals, teachers, and school committee members). Technical triangulation was conducted by verifying the accuracy of the data through different channels, for example, comparing interview results about the supervision program with documentation of the supervision schedule and direct observations during supervision.

As a complement, the researcher also conducted member checks by reconfirming the initial findings and interpretations with the informants to ensure that the meanings captured by the researcher align with the research subjects' intentions. Furthermore, the data analysis in this study refers to the interactive model by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (Miles et al., 2020), which consists of three main simultaneous activity flows: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing or verification. Data reduction was carried out continuously by summarizing, coding, and sorting relevant primary data. Data presentation was carried out in the form of descriptive narratives arranged thematically, supported by matrices and flowcharts to facilitate the researcher in seeing the relationships between categories. Conclusions were drawn inductively by continuously searching for patterns, themes, and relationships between phenomena, which were then re-verified through additional data collection and discussions with stakeholders.

This research adhered to strict ethical protocols. The researcher submitted an official research permit to the local education office and the school to establish legal access to the field. All participants, both principals and teachers, received a written informed consent statement explaining the purpose of the study, their right to withdraw, and guaranteeing the confidentiality of their identities and personal data. In the report, informants' identities were disguised using code names or initials to protect the privacy of the research subjects. By combining systematic scientific procedures and adherence to a code of ethics, this research method yielded valid and reliable findings and significantly contributed to the development of educational management science in Indonesia.

C. Results and Discussion

This discussion follows up on the data analysis, which aims to provide an interpretation of the research findings on principal leadership management in

improving teacher's performance at SD Negeri 01 Tanjung Kukuh. The results indicate that principal leadership management operates systematically through four main stages. This finding demonstrates that principal leadership plays a crucial role in improving teacher's performance. Consistency between interview results, observations, and documentation indicates that the management implemented is not only conceptual but also implementable. Overall, the leadership cycle at SD Negeri 01 Tanjung Kukuh, which begins with participatory planning and continues with competency-based development, has established a professional work environment. The integration of leadership role models and technical guidance is a significant differentiating factor in improving teacher's performance at this school. The following is a discussion of principal leadership management in improving teacher's performance at SD Negeri 01 Tanjung Kukuh:

Principal Leadership Management Planning in Improving Teacher's Performance at SD Negeri 01 Tanjung Kukuh

Based on the data analysis, planning at SD Negeri 01 Tanjung Kukuh is carried out through a visionary and collaborative approach. The findings indicate that the principal formulated the vision and key management by involving teachers through meeting forums. Documentation data in the form of meeting minutes and supervision schedules strengthens evidence that planning was carried out in a structured manner. This aligns with Wahjosumidjo's theory (Wahjosumidjo, 2020). Research results show that the principal's leadership planning was carried out in a participatory and needs-based manner. This finding aligns with transformational leadership theory, which emphasises the importance of involving organisational members in the decision-making process (Bass & Avolio, 1994).

Effective principal leadership relies heavily on the leader's ability to develop a well-thought-out plan to mobilize school resources (Müller et al., 2020). Participatory planning implemented by principals has been shown to foster a shared understanding between leaders and teachers, enabling collective understanding of performance improvement goals. From a theoretical perspective, teacher involvement in planning reflects the dimensions of idealized influence and inspirational motivation, where leaders not only provide direction but also build shared commitment to organizational goals (Bass & Avolio, 1994; Kareem et al., 2023). Furthermore, the use of supervision results as a basis for planning demonstrates an evidence-based leadership approach, which, according to modern educational management studies, is an indicator of effective leadership (Saro et al., 2025). Data-driven planning allows for more relevant and targeted programs. Thus, principal leadership planning is not merely administrative but has evolved into management planning oriented toward improving teacher's performance.

Implementation of Principal Leadership Management in Improving Teacher's Performance at SD Negeri 01 Tanjung Kukuh

The implementation of leadership demonstrates an integration of instructional and transformational leadership. Academic supervision carried out by the principal reflects the role of an instructional leader, as stated by Hallinger, that the principal has the primary responsibility for improving the quality of learning through supervision and teacher development (Hallinger, 2022). On the other hand, providing motivation, open communication, and appreciation for teachers demonstrates characteristics of transformational leadership (Bass & Avolio, 1994). This is evident in the principal's efforts to increase teacher intrinsic motivation, build positive interpersonal relationships, and create a conducive work climate. The combination of these two leadership styles has proven effective in improving teacher's performance, particularly in aspects of pedagogical competence, work discipline, and professionalism. Leadership implementation in the field is realized through guidance, motivation, and role modeling. Researchers verified through observation that the principal serves as a role model in terms of discipline (arriving on time and dressing neatly).

Furthermore, technical guidance is provided on an ongoing basis to ensure teachers are able to implement innovative learning methods. These findings regarding the provision of motivation and rewards are reinforced by Uka & Prendi (2021), which asserts that motivation is a key factor in management to increase work productivity. By providing appreciation and incentives, the principal at SD Negeri 01 Tanjung Kukuh successfully built high teacher morale, which in turn impacted the quality of classroom teaching.

Evaluation of the Principal's Leadership Management Implementation in Improving Teacher's Performance at SD Negeri 01 Tanjung Kukuh

Periodic evaluations indicate that the principal has implemented the principles of performance-based management. In educational management theory, evaluation is part of the management cycle, which aims to measure the achievement of organizational goals (Robbins & Coulter, 2012). Research findings indicate that evaluations are not only conducted formally but are also accompanied by constructive feedback. This feedback is part of the concept of formative evaluation, which functions as a tool for continuous improvement. This is crucial for continuously improving the quality of learning and teacher's performance. Evaluations are conducted through a system of routine clinical supervision. Data verification results indicate that the principal not only reviews administrative procedures (lesson plans and syllabuses) but also conducts classroom observations to ensure the plan aligns with teaching practices. Post-supervision discussions provide a space for teachers to gain direct feedback. This aligns with Mulyasa's (2022) thinking, which emphasizes that the principal's supervisory (controlling) function should be guiding, not fault-finding.

The evaluation conducted at SD Negeri 01 Tanjung Kukuh serves as a quality control tool to identify performance barriers early and find joint solutions.

Follow-up of the Principal's Leadership Management in Improving Teacher's Performance at SD Negeri 01 Tanjung Kukuh

The follow-up actions taken by the principal demonstrate a commitment to the principle of continuous improvement in educational management. The ongoing coaching and monitoring program implemented the PDCA (Plan-Do-Check-Act) cycle introduced by Deming (1986), where each evaluation result serves as the basis for improvement. From a theoretical perspective, this follow-up reflects adaptive leadership that is responsive to organizational needs. This is an important indicator of the effectiveness of the principal's leadership in improving teacher's performance. Follow-up is the management's response to evaluation results to ensure continuous performance improvement. Research data confirms that principals follow up on supervision results by facilitating teacher participation in professional development activities such as workshops or teacher working groups. As stated in the research of Oluwatosin (2022) in their literature review, effective follow-up management must include providing solutions to teacher challenges. The principal's support in developing teacher professional competency at SD Negeri 01 Tanjung Kukuh demonstrates a long-term commitment to maintaining the quality of teaching staff in rural areas.

D. Conclusion

Based on the research findings and discussion regarding the principal's leadership management at SD Negeri 01 Tanjung Kukuh, this study conclusively establishes that the principal's leadership systematically and significantly improves teacher performance through the continuous integration of four management functions: planning, implementation, evaluation, and follow-up. In the planning stage, a participatory approach involving teachers in deliberation forums ensures programs are responsive to actual competency needs, resulting in highly relevant and implementable outcomes documented in the work plan and budget. During implementation, the principal optimizes coaching-based academic supervision, intrinsic motivation, and humanistic communication, directly enhancing teacher discipline, learning quality, and a conducive work climate. Performance evaluations are conducted structurally with clear instruments and constructive feedback, serving both as control and professional development tools. However, the follow-up aspect remains a critical link requiring strengthening, as performance improvement efforts tend to be reactive rather than systematically integrated into medium-term planning, leaving room for further enhancement. The improvements in teacher performance are reflected across eight key indicators: developing systematic learning tools; implementing interactive, student-centered learning; utilizing varied methods, media, and resources; conducting authentic assessments and outcome analysis; increasing

discipline and punctuality; active participation in professional development; responsiveness to supervisory feedback; and strengthened commitment to school goals. These indicators confirm holistic improvements across pedagogical, professional, personality, and social dimensions. Practically, principals should institutionalize participatory planning as a regular cycle, strengthen follow-up mechanisms through structured mentoring and innovation-driven program sustainability, and embed performance evaluation within broader professional development frameworks. Education authorities must provide continuous training in coaching-based supervision and facilitate resource access to support sustainable teacher development. For future research, it is recommended to conduct multi-site, comparative, or longitudinal studies to test the consistency and long-term impact of this leadership model across diverse contexts. Investigating moderating variables such as school culture, teacher self-efficacy, or resource availability would deepen theoretical understanding. Additionally, mixed-method approaches combining quantitative surveys with qualitative case studies could capture nuanced implementation challenges and stakeholder experiences, thereby refining the POAC-transformational leadership integration for broader applicability in rural educational settings.

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