

The Role of Elementary School Teachers' Professional Competencies in Optimizing Learning Quality

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Abstract

The professional competence of elementary school teachers plays a crucial role in optimizing the quality of learning at the primary level. Competent teachers not only master the subject matter but are also skilled in designing, implementing, and evaluating learning effectively. This study aims to analyze the contribution of elementary teachers' professional competence in improving learning quality through a literature review. The method used is a library study, analyzing various relevant journals and articles. The findings indicate that pedagogical mastery, professionalism, and innovative teaching skills significantly influence student learning outcomes. Teachers with strong pedagogical abilities can adapt teaching methods to students' needs, fostering better understanding and engagement. Additionally, professional competence enables teachers to utilize technology and creative learning strategies, making lessons more interactive and effective. Furthermore, continuous assessment and feedback from competent teachers help identify students' weaknesses and improve learning strategies. Continuous teacher training and qualification enhancement should be prioritized. Workshops, certification programs, and mentoring can help teachers stay updated with the latest educational developments. By improving teachers' professional competence, schools can ensure higher learning quality, better student achievement, and long-term educational success. Investing in teacher development is essential for building a strong foundation in elementary education.

Keywords : Teacher Professional Competence; Learning Quality; Elementary Education; Pedagogical Skills; Teacher Training



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1. Introduction

Quality education is the main foundation in forming a superior generation and able to compete in the era of globalization. However, in practice, there are still many schools that face serious challenges in improving the quality of academic services. One of the crucial factors that affect this is the leadership of the principal. Although the role of school principals as educational leaders is very vital, many educational institutions still experience obstacles such as lack of managerial competence, low learning innovation, and lack of teacher participation in academic policy-making. This condition has an impact on the stagnation of the quality of education, so strategic solutions are needed to optimize the leadership role of school principals in improving the quality of academic services, especially in the implementation of the Independent Curriculum which requires flexibility and creativity.

To address these problems, this study will examine various leadership approaches that are relevant in the context of education, especially transformational leadership and quality management. Transformational leadership (Burns, 1978) is considered effective because it emphasizes teacher motivation, inspiration, and capacity building, while quality management (Deming, 1986) offers a systematic framework for improving the quality of education through continuous improvement. This research will analyze how the application of these two approaches can encourage the improvement of the quality of academic services, especially in the Independent Curriculum which prioritizes learning independence and student competency development.

Based on the above background, this research has two main objectives. First, analyze the leadership role of school principals in improving the quality of academic services in schools, especially in the context of the implementation of the Independent Curriculum. Second, identify the most effective leadership style to encourage the improvement of the quality of education, both in terms of managerial and professional development of teachers. Thus, this research is

expected to provide practical recommendations for education leaders in optimizing their role to achieve better learning goals.

Transformational leadership theory (Bass & Avolio, 1994) states that effective leaders are able to motivate subordinates through inspirational vision, individual support, and intellectual stimulation. In the context of education, principals who apply this style tend to succeed in creating a dynamic and collaborative learning environment (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000). On the other hand, the theory of education quality management (Deming, 1986) emphasizes the importance of continuous improvement through planning, implementation, evaluation, and follow-up. The combination of transformational leadership and a quality management approach is expected to be a holistic solution in improving the quality of academic services.

This research is expected to make a significant contribution both theoretically and practically. Theoretically, the results of this research can enrich the scientific treasures of educational leadership and quality management in the era of the Independent Curriculum. Practically, the findings of this study can be a reference for school principals, educators, and policy makers in designing strategies to improve the quality of education. In addition, this research is also expected to have a positive impact on improving teacher competence, learning quality, and academic achievement of students.

The Independent Curriculum requires schools to be more adaptive and innovative in organizing learning. Strong and visionary leadership of the principal is the key to success in implementing this curriculum. This research will examine how the right leadership style can support teachers' flexibility in designing project-based learning (PBL), instructional differentiation, and authentic assessment. Thus, it is hoped that this research can provide operational guidance for schools that are transitioning to the Independent Curriculum.

Based on the description above, research on the leadership role of school principals in improving the quality of academic services is very relevant, especially in the context of curriculum changes and demands to improve the quality of

education. Through a theoretical and empirical approach, this research is expected to provide concrete solutions to leadership problems in schools while strengthening the foundation of Indonesian education towards a superior and globally competitive generation.

2. Method

This study uses a literature review method with a qualitative approach to analyze various academic sources related to the leadership of the principal and the quality of academic services. The literature study was chosen because it allows researchers to explore theoretical concepts in depth, identify patterns, and formulate a synthesis based on previous research findings (Machi & McEvoy, 2016). This research procedure includes four main stages, namely: (1) research design, (2) population and literature samples, (3) data collection techniques, and (4) data analysis techniques.

The research design is descriptive-analytical, where the researcher examines various theories and empirical findings from reliable sources to answer the research question. This approach was chosen because it is in accordance with the research objectives, which are to understand the leadership role of school principals in improving the quality of academic services and identify the most effective leadership style (Creswell, 2014). In addition, this study also adopts the principle of systematic literature review to ensure that the literature selection and analysis process is carried out systematically and can be accounted for (Gough, Oliver, & Thomas, 2017).

The population and sample in this study consisted of scientific journals, books, research reports, and education policy documents relevant to the topic. The selection criteria include: (1) publications in the last 10 years (2014-2024), (2) from journals indexed by Scopus, Sinta, or with international reputation, and (3) containing discussions about educational leadership, quality management, or the Independent Curriculum. Sources that do not meet these criteria are excluded to maintain the validity of the data.

The data collection technique was carried out through searches of academic databases such as Google Scholar, ERIC, ScienceDirect, and JSTOR using keywords such as "principal leadership," "academic service quality," "Independent Curriculum," and "transformational leadership." The research instrument is in the form of a literature analysis matrix that contains information about the title, author, year of publication, methods, findings, and relevance to this research. The use of this matrix helps researchers in systematically categorizing and comparing data (Yin, 2018).

Data analysis techniques refer to thematic analysis with the following steps: (1) coding (coding key concepts), (2) categorization (grouping data based on themes such as transformational leadership, quality management, and academic service improvement strategies), and (3) synthesis (drawing conclusions and recommendations based on the patterns found) (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The results of the analysis were then validated through source triangulation by comparing findings from various literature to ensure the accuracy of the data (Patton, 2002). The research is expected to provide a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of school principals' leadership in the context of improving the quality of education, as well as providing practical recommendations for policymakers and education practitioners.

3. Result and Discussion

Result

Based on the analysis of the literature conducted, this study reveals that the leadership of school principals plays a central role in improving the quality of academic services, especially in the context of the implementation of the Independent Curriculum. The results of the study show that school principals who implement transformational leadership tend to succeed in creating a dynamic learning environment oriented towards improving the quality of education. These findings are in line with the theory of Leithwood & Jantzi (2000) which states that transformational leaders are able to inspire teachers through clear vision,

intrinsic motivation, and the development of a collaborative culture. A concrete example is the "Sharing Teachers" program initiated by several schools, where teachers regularly discuss to exchange innovative learning strategies. This program not only improves teachers' pedagogic competence, but also strengthens synergy between educators in achieving academic goals.

In addition to transformational leadership, strengthening teacher competencies through continuous training has been proven to be effective in improving the quality of learning. Robinson et al. (2008) emphasized that school principals must prioritize teacher professional development, both through workshops, academic supervision, and reward systems. One of the models that has been successfully implemented is "Lesson Study", where teachers collaboratively observe, reflect, and improve teaching methods. As a result, there has been a significant increase in students' learning creativity and academic achievement. The availability of educational facilities and infrastructure is also a determining factor. This study found that schools with adequate facilities such as modern science laboratories, digital libraries, and access to learning technology tend to have better quality of academic services. School principals play the role of advocates who actively establish partnerships with external parties to meet infrastructure needs. For example, some schools have successfully secured support from private companies to provide the latest laboratory equipment, which has an impact on increasing students' motivation to learn.

Another crucial finding is the importance of continuous evaluation in ensuring the effectiveness of quality improvement programs. Data-based monitoring systems such as student and parent satisfaction surveys, learning outcome analysis, and curriculum audits are able to identify challenges early and formulate appropriate solutions. For example, a school implements a digital feedback system that allows students to provide real-time input on teaching methods. This data is then used to build a measurable improvement program.

Implications of Research Results

Overall, this study concludes that a combination of transformational leadership, teacher development, adequate infrastructure, and systematic evaluation is a holistic strategy to improve the quality of academic services. School principals not only play the role of administrators, but also agents of change that encourage the realization of quality education in the era of the Independent Curriculum. The practical recommendations are:

- a. Leadership training for school principals to be able to adopt transformational approaches and quality management.
- b. Increase budget allocation for teacher development and educational facilities.
- c. The application of a technology-based evaluation system to monitor academic progress in real-time.

Discussion

The results of this study reinforce the previous finding that the leadership of school principals is a determining factor in improving the quality of academic services, especially in the context of the implementation of the Independent Curriculum which emphasizes independence and learning innovation. The findings on the effectiveness of transformational leadership are in line with research by Leithwood & Sun (2012) which proves that this leadership style significantly contributes to increased teacher motivation and a conducive school climate. However, this study reveals a new nuance that the success of the transformational approach must be supported by support systems such as teacher training and the availability of infrastructure. This explains why some schools that have implemented transformational leadership have not shown optimal improvement due to a lack of adequate infrastructure support and evaluation systems.

The findings on the importance of developing teacher competencies through programs such as Lesson Study enrich the theoretical discussion from Robinson (2007) on instructional leadership. The results of the analysis show that participatory academic supervision (such as Lesson Study) is more effective than

conventional supervision models, because it actively involves teachers in the process of reflection and learning improvement. This also answers critics such as Hallinger (2018) who doubt the impact of instructional leadership in schools with a low culture of collaboration. Empirical data from this study prove that when principals create structured collaboration mechanisms (such as Teacher Sharing forums), the impact of instructional leadership becomes more pronounced.

The limitations of this research need to be acknowledged, especially in terms of the scope of literature that may not be representative of all the variations in the educational context in Indonesia. However, the findings on the role of continuous evaluation make an important contribution to the development of education quality management theory. The results of this study support Deming's (1986) proposition of the Plan-Do-Check-Act cycle, as well as introduce a relevant modification for the modern educational context namely the integration of technology in the evaluation system (digital feedback system).

4. Conclusion

Based on the results of the research and discussion that has been described, it can be concluded that the leadership of school principals is a crucial factor in improving the quality of academic services, especially in the context of the implementation of the Independent Curriculum. This research confirms that transformational leadership—which focuses on building vision, inspiration, and teacher empowerment—is the most effective leadership style for creating a dynamic and innovation-oriented learning environment. These findings are reinforced by evidence that schools with principals that implement participatory and collaborative approaches, such as through Teacher Sharing and Lesson Study programs, show significant improvements in the quality of learning and student learning outcomes. In addition, this study also reveals that the success of transformational leadership must be supported by strong managerial competencies, including the ability to manage resources, continuous evaluation, and utilize educational technology. The principal not only plays the role of a

visionary leader, but also as a manager who is able to design a support system to ensure the sustainability of academic quality improvement.

The implication of these findings is the need for a comprehensive leadership development program for principals, which includes not only transformational leadership training, but also the strengthening of managerial skills and the ability to leverage data for decision-making. Thus, school principals can play the role of agents of change who are able to bring schools to higher educational quality standards. This research also opens up space for further study of the integration between transformational leadership and data-driven approaches in the context of evolving education policies.

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