

Principal Leadership Strategies for Enhancing Teacher Professional Competence: Evidence from a Rural Primary School in Barito Kuala Regency

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords: Instructional Leadership, Professional Competence, Teacher Development, Academic Supervision, School Leadership

Received : 4 April 2026

Revised : 18 May 2026

Accepted: 19 Juni 2026

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the principal's leadership strategies in developing teachers' professional competence at SDN Tinggiran II.1 Barito Kuala Regency. The research employed a qualitative descriptive approach. Data were collected through interviews, observations, and documentation involving the principal, teachers, and school supervisor selected purposively. Data analysis followed the interactive model consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings indicate that the principal implements leadership strategies through four main stages: planning teacher development programs, conducting coaching and training, implementing academic supervision, and carrying out evaluation and follow-up activities. The principal acts as an instructional leader by providing guidance, facilitation, motivation, and mentoring for teachers. Supporting factors include participatory leadership, collaborative school culture, high teacher motivation, and conducive working relationships. In contrast, inhibiting factors consist of limited facilities, budget constraints, unequal teacher competencies, and geographical challenges affecting access to professional development opportunities. Efforts to improve teachers' professional competence are undertaken through internal training, participation in Teacher Working Groups (KKG), academic supervision, mentoring, technology utilization, and collaborative learning culture. The study concludes that effective principal leadership significantly contributes to improving teachers' professional competence and educational quality.

INTRODUCTION

Improving the quality of education is a strategic agenda in developing competitive and sustainable human resources. In the context of basic education, teachers play a central role as the primary actors determining the success of the learning process. Therefore, developing teachers' professional competencies is a crucial indicator of improving educational quality. Professional competency is not only related to mastery of teaching materials, but also encompasses teachers' abilities to develop innovative learning, utilize educational technology, and engage in continuous reflection and self-development. However, various studies indicate that there is still a gap between expected teacher competency standards and the reality of their implementation in the field, particularly in schools located in rural areas with limited resources.

Empirically, the issue of teacher professional competence remains complex. Some teachers still face limitations in implementing innovative learning models, utilizing digital technology, and participating in ongoing professional development activities. These conditions are influenced not only by individual teacher factors, but also by the school's organizational environment, work culture, institutional support, and the quality of the principal's leadership. From the perspective of educational leadership theory, the principal holds a strategic position as an instructional leader responsible for directing, guiding, facilitating, and developing teachers' professional capacity. Effective leadership can create a collaborative work climate, increase work motivation, and encourage teachers to continuously adapt to the changing demands of 21st-century education.

At Tinggiran II.1 Elementary School in Barito Kuala Regency, developing teacher professional competency faces unique challenges. Limited access to training, the region's geographic location, and differences in competency levels among teachers hinder efforts to improve professionalism. Despite this, the principal has endeavored to implement various development programs through academic supervision, internal training, professional discussions, and strengthening a collaborative culture. This phenomenon demonstrates that the success of improving teacher competency is not solely determined by the availability of resources, but also by the leadership strategies implemented by the principal in managing and empowering the school's full potential.

Much research has been conducted on principal leadership and teacher competency, but most previous studies have focused on the influence of leadership style on teacher performance or learning quality in urban schools. Relatively limited research has examined principal leadership strategies in developing teacher professional competency in elementary schools in rural areas with limited geographic characteristics and resources. Therefore, the novelty of this study lies in its in-depth analysis of principal leadership strategies as instructional leaders in developing teacher professional competency in the context of rural elementary schools in Barito Kuala Regency.

Based on the description, this article aims to analyze the principal's leadership strategy in developing teacher professional competence at SDN Tinggiran II.1, Barito Kuala Regency, identify supporting and inhibiting factors

that influence its implementation, and describe various efforts made by the school to improve teacher professional competence in a sustainable manner.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Principal leadership is a key factor in determining the success of educational delivery in schools. In the modern educational context, principals no longer serve solely as administrators managing the administrative aspects of schools, but also as instructional leaders responsible for improving teacher quality and student learning outcomes. Various studies have shown that the quality of principal leadership is significantly related to learning effectiveness, school organizational culture, and the development of teacher professional competencies (Hallinger, 2011; Bush, 2018).

According to Yukl (2013), leadership is the process of influencing others to understand and agree on what needs to be done and how to do it effectively to achieve organizational goals. In the context of education, principal leadership is defined as the ability to mobilize, influence, guide, and direct all school resources to achieve educational goals effectively and efficiently (Mulyasa, 2022). Therefore, the principal is a central figure in creating a conducive learning environment and encouraging continuous improvement in teacher competency.

One theory widely used to explain the effectiveness of principal leadership is instructional leadership. Hallinger (2011) explains that instructional leadership focuses on three main dimensions: formulating the school's vision and mission, managing learning programs, and creating a school climate that supports the teaching and learning process. Principals who implement instructional leadership not only oversee academic activities but also actively participate in teacher professional development through supervision, training, mentoring, and learning evaluation. Thus, school success is largely determined by the principal's ability to direct and empower teachers as the primary actors in the educational process.

In addition to instructional leadership, transformational leadership theory also has strong relevance in developing teachers' professional competencies. Bass and Avolio (1994) explain that transformational leaders are able to inspire and motivate their subordinates to work beyond personal interests to achieve larger organizational goals. Transformational leadership consists of four main dimensions: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. In a school environment, principals who implement a transformational leadership style are able to build a strong learning culture, encourage learning innovation, and increase teachers' commitment to their professional development (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006).

Developing teacher professional competence is one of the primary goals of educational leadership. Law Number 14 of 2005 concerning Teachers and Lecturers states that teachers are required to possess four core competencies: pedagogical, professional, social, and personality. Among these four competencies, professional competence relates to a teacher's ability to master learning materials broadly and deeply, understand the scientific structure of the

subject being taught, and develop innovative learning in line with advances in science and technology.

According to Mulyasa (2019), teacher professional competence encompasses not only mastery of teaching materials, but also the ability to conduct reflection, conduct classroom action research, develop learning media, and utilize information technology in the learning process. Professional teachers are required to continuously learn and develop themselves to meet the challenges of 21st-century education, characterized by the development of digital technology, globalization, and changing student needs.

From an educational management perspective, developing teacher professional competency requires a systematic and sustainable strategy. Terry (2018) explains that strategy is a series of planned actions designed to effectively achieve organizational goals. In the school context, the principal's leadership strategy for developing teacher competency can be realized through teacher development program planning, training and coaching, academic supervision, and ongoing evaluation and follow-up.

The first stage in a teacher development strategy is planning. Planning is the process of determining teacher competency development needs based on the results of performance evaluations, academic supervision, and school needs analysis. Sagala (2020) emphasized that effective planning must be based on teachers' actual needs so that the designed program can have an optimal impact on improving the quality of learning. Principals who involve teachers in the planning process tend to foster a sense of belonging to the development program being implemented.

The second stage is the implementation of teacher competency development programs. These programs can take the form of training, workshops, seminars, in-house training, teacher working groups (KKG), or professional learning community activities. DuFour, DuFour, and Eaker (2010) explain that professional learning communities are an effective approach to improving teacher competency through collaboration, reflection, and sharing experiences among fellow teachers. Through learning communities, teachers not only gain new knowledge but also can discuss various learning issues they face in the classroom.

In addition to training and learning communities, academic supervision is a crucial strategy for developing teachers' professional competencies. Academic supervision is a professional development process carried out by the principal to help teachers improve the quality of learning. Sergiovanni and Starratt (2007) explain that effective academic supervision must be collaborative, reflective, and oriented toward improving learning. The principal acts not only as an evaluator but also as a mentor who provides constructive feedback to teachers. Through ongoing supervision, teachers can identify strengths and weaknesses in their teaching practices and thus make systematic improvements.

Furthermore, the success of a principal's leadership strategy in developing teacher competency is also influenced by the school's organizational culture. Schein (2017) explains that organizational culture is a set of values, beliefs, and norms shared by members of an organization. In a school environment, a

collaborative culture characterized by open communication, cooperation, and mutual support among teachers will accelerate the professional development process. Conversely, an individualistic work culture that is less supportive of innovation can be a barrier to improving teacher competency.

Various empirical studies have shown that principal leadership has a significant influence on the development of teacher professional competence. Hadiyanto (2021) found that principals who implement transformational leadership are able to improve teacher professionalism through continuous academic supervision, coaching, and teacher empowerment. The study also demonstrated that effective communication and a collaborative culture are crucial factors in the successful development of teacher competence.

Another study conducted by Hidayat (2021) showed that principal leadership strategies through internal training, academic supervision, and rewarding teacher achievement significantly increased teacher motivation and professional competence. This finding aligns with research by Rahayu and Suparno (2020), which concluded that a participatory approach to school leadership can increase teacher engagement in various professional development programs.

In the context of elementary schools in rural areas, the role of the principal becomes increasingly crucial due to limited access to training and learning resources. Principals are required to optimize available resources through various innovative strategies such as in-house training, technology-based learning, partnerships with other schools, and strengthening teacher learning communities. Thus, principals function as agents of change, bridging the gap between resource limitations and the need for teacher competency improvement.

Based on various theories and previous research findings, it can be concluded that a principal's leadership strategy in developing teacher professional competence is a complex and multidimensional process. Its success is determined by the principal's ability to plan development programs, implement coaching and supervision, build a collaborative culture, and conduct ongoing evaluation and follow-up. Through effective leadership, principals can create a learning environment that supports teacher professional development and ultimately improves the overall quality of education.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative approach with a descriptive approach. The qualitative approach was chosen because it aimed to deeply understand the phenomenon of principals' leadership strategies in developing teacher professional competence based on the natural conditions that occur in the school environment. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), qualitative research is used to explore and understand the meanings individuals or groups attach to social or humanitarian issues. This approach allows researchers to obtain a comprehensive picture of principals' leadership practices in a real-world context.

The research location was SDN Tinggiran II.1, Barito Kuala Regency. Research informants were determined using purposive sampling, which involves deliberately selecting informants based on their knowledge, experience,

and direct involvement in the research focus (Sugiyono, 2023). The informants consisted of the principal, teachers, and school supervisors who understood the process of developing teacher professional competency at the school.

Data collection techniques included in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation. Interviews were used to obtain information on leadership strategies, supporting and inhibiting factors, and teacher competency development efforts. Observations were conducted to directly observe the principal's leadership activities and the implementation of teacher development. Documentation was used to supplement the data, including work programs, supervision reports, meeting minutes, and other relevant documents (Moleong, 2021).

Data analysis used the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), which includes three stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing or verification. The analysis process was carried out continuously from data collection until the research was completed. To ensure data validity, the study employed source triangulation, technical triangulation, and time triangulation techniques. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), triangulation is an important strategy in qualitative research to increase the credibility, dependability, and confirmability of research findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Principal Leadership Strategy in Developing Teacher Professional Competence

The results of the study indicate that the principal of SDN Tinggiran II.1, Barito Kuala Regency, implemented a leadership strategy oriented towards developing teachers' professional competencies through four main stages: planning teacher development programs, implementing coaching and training, academic supervision, and ongoing evaluation and follow-up. This strategy demonstrates that the principal not only carries out administrative functions but also plays a role as an instructional leader focused on improving the quality of learning.

During the planning stage, the principal identifies teacher needs through work meetings, performance evaluations, and discussions with educators. A teacher development program is then developed based on actual needs identified in the field. These findings indicate that the principal applies the principles of needs assessment in developing educational human resources. According to Sagala (2018), effective planning must begin with identifying organizational needs so that the designed program is relevant to the issues faced. This approach also reflects participatory leadership practices, as teachers are involved in determining the direction of their professional development.

From the perspective of Bass and Avolio's (1994) transformational leadership theory, teacher involvement in planning represents individualized consideration, a leader's attention to the individual needs of their subordinates. The principal does not impose a program from above (a top-down approach), but rather builds a shared understanding of competencies that need improvement.

This creates a sense of ownership of the program, thereby increasing teachers' commitment to active participation.

The next stage is the implementation of coaching and training. Based on research findings, principals routinely provide coaching through group discussions, in-house training, and encouraging teachers to participate in Teacher Working Groups (KKG). Furthermore, teachers are given the opportunity to share experiences and best practices in teaching with colleagues.

This finding aligns with the Professional Learning Community (PLC) concept proposed by DuFour et al. (2010), which states that improving teacher competency will be more effective if implemented through a culture of collective and collaborative learning. Teachers are no longer individuals working in isolation, but rather part of a professional community that learns from each other and shares knowledge. In the context of rural elementary schools like SDN Tinggiran II.1, this collaborative approach is crucial because limited access to formal training can be offset through internal school learning.

Furthermore, academic supervision is the primary strategy used by principals to ensure improved learning quality. Supervision is conducted through classroom observations, monitoring of learning materials, and providing feedback to teachers. Supervision is not merely a control tool, but rather a professional development process that helps teachers improve their teaching practices.

This practice aligns with the view of Sergiovanni and Starratt (2007), who stated that effective academic supervision must be oriented toward teacher professional development through reflection and constructive dialogue. The principal acts as a coach, helping teachers identify strengths and weaknesses in the learning process. Thus, supervision does not create fear, but becomes a means of collaborative learning to improve the quality of teaching.

The final stage is evaluation and follow-up. Research results show that principals evaluate the implementation of teacher development programs through evaluation meetings, teacher performance assessments, and reflections on supervision results. The evaluations are then followed up with ongoing coaching programs tailored to each teacher's individual needs.

These findings demonstrate the existence of a continuous improvement cycle. From an educational quality management perspective, evaluation is not merely a tool for measuring success but also an organizational learning mechanism for improving future performance. This approach aligns with the concept of Total Quality Management (TQM), which emphasizes continuous improvement as the foundation for enhancing the quality of educational organizations.

Teacher Competency Development

The results of the study show that the principal's leadership strategy has a positive impact on the development of teacher competencies, including pedagogical, professional, social and personality competencies.

In terms of pedagogical competence, teachers demonstrated improvements in their ability to design lessons, develop teaching materials, and implement

more varied teaching methods. Teachers no longer relied on lectures but began integrating group discussions, contextual learning, and the use of instructional media. This demonstrates a transformation from teacher-centered learning to student-centered learning.

According to Shulman (1987), pedagogical competence is a combination of mastery of material and the ability to convey it to students effectively. With increased pedagogical competence, the quality of learning interactions improves, enabling students to gain more meaningful learning experiences.

In terms of professional competence, teachers experienced improvements in their mastery of teaching materials, use of educational technology, and ability to independently develop teaching materials. Research results indicate that principals encourage teachers to utilize technology as a learning resource and medium. This situation is highly relevant to the demands of 21st-century education, which emphasizes the importance of digital literacy in the learning process.

This finding supports Hidayat's (2021) research, which states that the principal's transformational leadership positively influences the improvement of teacher professional competence through empowerment and strengthening a learning culture. Teachers who receive support from their principal tend to be more motivated to improve their professional capacity.

In terms of social competence, teachers demonstrated improved communication and collaboration skills with fellow teachers, students, and parents. The collaborative culture fostered by the principal fostered harmonious interpersonal relationships, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of teamwork within the school environment.

Meanwhile, in terms of personal competency, teachers demonstrated increased discipline, responsibility, and commitment to their professional duties. The principal acts as a role model, providing examples of professional behavior to the entire school community. According to Bandura (1986), individual behavior is greatly influenced by the process of observing models perceived as authoritative. Therefore, the principal's exemplary behavior is a crucial factor in shaping teachers' professional culture.

Supporting and Inhibiting Factors

Research has found that the success of a principal's leadership strategy is supported by several important factors. The first factor is supportive and participatory leadership. The principal provides space for teachers to express their opinions, participate in decision-making, and develop learning innovations.

The second factor is the culture of collaboration that develops within the school environment. Teachers develop a habit of discussing and helping each other solve learning problems. This collaborative culture strengthens organizational learning, which is a crucial foundation for improving educational quality.

The third factor is strong teacher motivation to improve their competency. Intrinsic motivation is a crucial factor in the success of professional development programs. According to Deci and Ryan (2000), individuals with intrinsic

motivation tend to be more committed to the learning and self-development process than those driven solely by external factors.

In addition to supporting factors, the study also identified a number of inhibiting factors. The primary factor is limited educational facilities and infrastructure. Limited technological resources prevent teachers from optimizing digital-based learning. Furthermore, limited school budgets also limit teachers' opportunities to participate in intensive external training.

Another inhibiting factor is differences in teacher competency levels. Not all teachers have the same ability to accept change and adopt learning innovations. Some teachers adapt more quickly, while others require more intensive guidance.

The geographical conditions of Barito Kuala Regency also pose a challenge. The schools' relatively remote locations from training centers limit access to professional development programs. This finding reinforces Hallinger and Bryant's (2013) argument that local context significantly influences the effectiveness of educational leadership implementation.

Overall, the research results indicate that the principal's leadership strategy at SDN Tinggiran II.1 reflects a combination of transformational, instructional, and participatory leadership. The principal acts not only as an administrator but also as a change agent, encouraging the improvement of teachers' professional capacity.

These findings reinforce Hallinger's (2011) theory that effective principals are those who are able to direct the organization's focus on improving the quality of learning. Furthermore, the research findings also demonstrate the relevance of Bass and Avolio's (1994) theory on transformational leadership, which emphasizes inspiration, motivation, and empowerment of subordinates.

The principal leadership strategy model resulting from this study demonstrates that improving teacher professional competence is a systemic, ongoing process influenced by the interaction between the school context, leadership strategies, environmental factors, and ongoing evaluation mechanisms. This model positions the principal as an instructional leader who plays a central role in mobilizing all school resources to achieve improved learning quality, as shown in Figure 1.



Figure 1. Principal's Leadership Strategy Model

In the initial phase, leadership strategies are developed based on an analysis of the school context, including the characteristics of rural schools, limited facilities and infrastructure, geographic conditions, and variations in teacher competency levels. This contextual analysis serves as the basis for principals to design development programs that meet the actual needs of teachers and the school's conditions.

The implementation of the leadership strategy is carried out through four main stages. First, planning the teacher development program, which includes needs analysis, goal setting, program development, and resource allocation. Second, implementing coaching and training, through internal training, workshops, mentoring, coaching, and participation in the Teacher Working Group (KKG). Third, academic supervision, which is carried out through classroom observation, learning reflection, feedback, and professional mentoring. Fourth, evaluation and follow-up, which serves to measure the program's effectiveness and serve as a basis for continuous improvement.

The effectiveness of this strategy is influenced by supporting and inhibiting factors. Supporting factors include participatory leadership, a collaborative culture, harmonious interpersonal relationships, high teacher motivation, and a conducive school environment. Conversely, inhibiting factors include limited facilities, budget constraints, gaps in teacher competency, and geographic barriers that limit access to educational resources.

In response to these challenges, school principals have developed various efforts to improve teachers' professional competence through internal coaching, regular academic supervision, assistance in developing learning materials, utilizing educational technology, and strengthening a culture of collaboration among teachers. These efforts have created a Professional Learning Community that enables teachers to learn collectively and sustainably.

The primary output of this model is improved teacher competency, encompassing pedagogical, professional, social, and personality competencies. This enhanced competency subsequently has broader implications, including improved learning quality, strengthened teacher professionalism, and improved student learning outcomes.

Theoretically, this model strengthens the perspective of Instructional Leadership Theory (Hallinger, 2011) and Transformational Leadership Theory (Bass & Avolio, 1994) which emphasizes that the success of teacher competency development is largely determined by the principal's ability to integrate the functions of planning, coaching, supervision, and evaluation into an adaptive learning leadership system. Thus, this model can be formulated as a Teacher Competency-Based Instructional Leadership Model, namely a leadership model that places teacher competency development as the core strategy for improving the quality of education through a cycle of planning, implementation, supervision, evaluation, and continuous improvement.

In the context of regional education, this research provides important implications: limited resources are not always the primary barrier to improving educational quality. Adaptive, collaborative, and visionary principal leadership can optimize available resources to enhance teacher professional competence.

Thus, school success is not solely determined by the availability of facilities, but also by the quality of leadership that effectively mobilizes all educational resources.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

Based on the results of research on the Principal's Leadership Strategy in Developing Teacher Professional Competence at SDN Tinggiran II.1, Barito Kuala Regency, it can be concluded that the principal's leadership plays a very strategic role in improving teacher professional competence and the quality of learning in schools. The leadership strategy implemented not only focuses on administrative aspects, but also positions the principal as an instructional leader who plays an active role in fostering, motivating, and developing teacher capacity on an ongoing basis.

First, the principal's leadership strategy for developing teacher professional competency is implemented through four main stages: planning teacher development programs, implementing coaching and training, academic supervision, and evaluation and follow-up. Through these stages, the principal is able to guide teachers to improve the quality of learning, strengthen their mastery of teaching materials, and encourage the implementation of more innovative and student-oriented learning methods.

Second, the successful implementation of leadership strategies is supported by several important factors, namely participatory and supportive principal leadership, harmonious interpersonal relationships, a collaborative school culture, high teacher motivation, and a conducive work environment. These factors create a positive organizational climate, facilitating the process of developing teacher professional competence.

Third, several factors hinder the development of teacher professional competence, including limited educational facilities and infrastructure, limited budgets for professional development activities, differences in teacher competency levels, and geographic conditions that affect access to various training and professional development programs. These constraints demonstrate that improving teacher competence depends not only on internal school factors but also on support from the broader education system.

Fourth, various efforts to improve teachers' professional competence have been implemented through internal school training, regular academic supervision, participation in Teacher Working Groups (KKG), assistance in developing learning materials, utilizing information technology in teaching, and strengthening a culture of learning and sharing good practices among teachers. These efforts have been proven to help teachers improve their pedagogical, professional, social, and personal competencies more comprehensively.

Thus, this study confirms that a principal's transformational, participatory, and learning-oriented leadership strategy significantly contributes to improving teacher professional competence. Effective leadership not only develops individual teacher capacity but also builds a school organizational culture that supports continuous improvement in educational quality.

Recommendations

Based on the research findings, principals need to continuously strengthen instructional leadership strategies through coaching, ongoing academic supervision, and motivation and facilitation of teacher competency development. A collaborative culture among teachers also needs to be fostered through Teacher Working Group (KKG) activities, professional discussions, and the sharing of best practices in teaching.

In addition, the Barito Kuala Regency Education Office is expected to provide more optimal support through the provision of ongoing training programs, improving educational facilities and infrastructure, and expanding teacher access to professional development, especially for schools located in areas with geographical limitations.

Teachers need a commitment to continuously develop their professional competencies independently through the use of technology, participation in training, and increased reflection on learning practices. With synergy between the principal, teachers, and education policymakers, sustainable improvements in the quality of learning and education at SDN Tinggiran II.1 in Barito Kuala Regency can be achieved.

The findings of this study indicate that the success of improving teacher professional competence is not solely determined by individual teacher abilities but is also significantly influenced by the quality of the principal's leadership. Therefore, investing in strengthening principal leadership capacity needs to be a priority in regional and national education policies as a strategy for sustainably improving education quality.

FURTHER STUDY

Further research is suggested to expand the research object to several schools using a mixed methods approach in order to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of the principal's leadership strategy in improving teacher professional competence.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The author would like to express his gratitude to the Principal of SDN Tinggiran II.1, Barito Kuala Regency, all research informants, supervising lecturers, and all parties who have provided support, information, and contributions during this research process.

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