

Principal Leadership and Teacher Performance Improvement: Findings from a Case Study in Wajo Regency

Besse Asriani¹, Besse Herlina², Syamsiar³, Muhammad Arafah⁴

Master of Educational Administration, Puangrimaggalatung
Sengkang University, Indonesia^{1,2,3,4}

Email korespondensi: besseasriani@admin.sd.belajar.id

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ABSTRACT: This study aims to explore the role of the school principal as a teacher leader in enhancing teacher performance at UPTD SDN 360 Anabanua, Maniangpajo District, Wajo Regency. Using a qualitative case study approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews with the school principal and selected teachers, observations, and document analysis. Findings indicate that the school principal plays a pivotal role in enhancing teacher performance by offering continuous motivation, personalized guidance, resource provision, and emotional support. These leadership practices foster a positive work environment, contributing significantly to improved teacher performance and student outcomes. The study underscores the school principal's role as a transformative leader, essential for driving educational quality improvements in elementary schools. The findings suggest that investing in leadership development for school principals could be a key strategy to advance educational excellence

Keywords: school principal role, teacher leader, teacher performance.

ABSTRAK: Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi peran kepala sekolah sebagai pemimpin guru dalam meningkatkan kinerja guru di UPTD SDN 360 Anabanua, Kecamatan Maniangpajo, Kabupaten Wajo. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan studi kasus kualitatif, data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam dengan kepala sekolah dan guru-guru terpilih, observasi, serta analisis dokumen. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa kepala sekolah memainkan peran penting dalam meningkatkan kinerja guru dengan memberikan motivasi yang berkelanjutan, bimbingan yang dipersonalisasi, penyediaan sumber daya, serta dukungan emosional. Praktik kepemimpinan ini menciptakan lingkungan kerja yang positif, yang berkontribusi secara signifikan terhadap peningkatan kinerja guru dan hasil belajar siswa. Studi ini menekankan peran kepala sekolah sebagai pemimpin transformasional yang sangat penting dalam mendorong perbaikan kualitas pendidikan di sekolah dasar. Temuan ini menyarankan bahwa investasi dalam pengembangan kepemimpinan bagi kepala sekolah dapat menjadi strategi kunci untuk meningkatkan keunggulan pendidikan.

Kata Kunci: kinerja guru, peran kepala sekolah, pemimpin guru.

INTRODUCTION

The Ministry of Education and Culture's Strategic Plan for 2020-2024, as outlined in Ministerial Regulation Number 22 of 2020, is centered around the Merdeka Belajar (Independent Learning) policy. This policy represents a transformative approach to education management in Indonesia, where the authority for managing and shaping educational programs is decentralized to schools and local governments. By granting this flexibility, the policy encourages educational institutions to plan, implement, and evaluate their own programs based on their unique contexts and needs, while still adhering to national educational goals.

The Merdeka Belajar policy is seen as a pivotal step toward improving the quality of education across Indonesia, especially in rural areas, where schools often face distinct challenges. By decentralizing authority, schools can tailor their programs to address local issues, such as teacher performance, student outcomes, and community engagement. In this framework, the role of school principals becomes increasingly critical. Principals are no longer confined to traditional administrative tasks but are expected to assume a leadership role that encompasses the development and motivation of teachers.

One school that highlights these challenges is UPTD SDN 360 Anabanua, located in Wajo Regency, Maniangpajo District. Like many rural schools in Indonesia, SDN 360 Anabanua faces various obstacles in improving the quality of education. These challenges include limited resources, difficulties in maintaining teacher motivation, and the ongoing need to enhance teacher performance. Within the framework of Merdeka Belajar, the school principal at SDN 360 Anabanua is tasked with addressing these issues through effective leadership, particularly in inspiring and motivating teachers to improve their performance.

Research suggests that the role of the school principal as a teacher leader is critical to overcoming these challenges. A teacher leader is not merely a manager but a transformative figure who can foster a positive work environment, provide guidance and support to teachers, and ensure that educational goals are met. In the context of SDN 360 Anabanua, the principal's ability to inspire and motivate teachers is essential in creating an environment where teachers feel valued, supported, and empowered to grow professionally. This is particularly important in rural schools, where teachers may face additional difficulties such as isolation, lack of professional development opportunities, and limited access to resources.

In exploring the role of the principal at SDN 360 Anabanua, this study seeks to understand how leadership practices can enhance teacher performance in a rural setting. Through qualitative research, including interviews with the principal, teachers, and other stakeholders, this study aims to uncover the specific strategies employed by the principal to foster a supportive and growth-oriented environment for teachers. By understanding these strategies, the study will identify leadership practices that can be replicated or adapted in other rural schools facing similar challenges. Moreover, the findings of this research will contribute to the broader

discourse on educational leadership in Indonesia, particularly in relation to the Merdeka Belajar policy. While the policy provides a framework for schools to take control of their own educational programs, it is the school leaders who must effectively implement this framework to drive meaningful improvements. Therefore, understanding how leadership influences teacher performance in rural schools can inform future policies and initiatives aimed at improving education in these areas.

This study aims to provide a comprehensive examination of how the school principal at SDN 360 Anabanua fulfills the role of a teacher leader and the impact this has on teacher performance. The research will offer practical insights into leadership strategies that can be implemented to enhance teacher performance, not only in SDN 360 Anabanua but also in other schools throughout Indonesia. Ultimately, the study will contribute to ongoing efforts to improve the quality of education in rural areas, aligning with the broader goals of the Merdeka Belajar policy and the Ministry of Education and Culture's Strategic Plan for 2020-2024. Through effective leadership, schools can overcome the challenges they face and create a more equitable, high-quality educational system for all.

Educational Leadership and Administration are Crucial for Improving Teacher Performance

Educational administration is pivotal in achieving institutional goals through the effective coordination and management of various aspects within the educational environment. According to Fadhila (2020), this administrative process involves harmonizing human behavior and resources to meet educational objectives productively. Definitions from experts further elucidate this, describing educational administration as a comprehensive process that includes planning, organizing, directing, and evaluating to attain educational goals (Parwanto, 2020; Ministry of Education and Culture, Indonesia; Nawawi, 2016; Engkoswa, 2021). Each perspective highlights the integral role of effective administration in ensuring that educational institutions function optimally.

The role of the school principal is central to improving educational quality. As Sekolah and Guru (2016) argue, effective leadership is crucial for enhancing school management and teacher performance. The Ministerial Regulation Number 21 of 2018 delineates the responsibilities of school principals, which encompass leadership, resource management, curriculum development, and teacher development (Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, 2018). Effective principals must manage the school efficiently while also motivating and supporting teachers to achieve high performance standards (Susanto, 2016). This alignment of administrative responsibilities with leadership qualities underscores the principal's significant impact on educational quality.

The "Guru Penggerak" or Teacher Catalyst initiative is a key component of Indonesia's Merdeka Belajar policy. Mansyur (2022) emphasizes that Guru Penggerak are expected to drive educational transformation by supporting student-centered

learning and serving as role models within the education ecosystem. This initiative seeks to address challenges related to teacher quality by focusing on developing essential competencies in pedagogical, personal, social, and professional domains (Sibagariang et al., 2021). By equipping teachers with these competencies, the program aims to enhance overall educational effectiveness.

Teacher performance, which encompasses teaching ability, student interaction, assessment practices, and professional development, is crucial for achieving educational outcomes (Iskandar, 2013). Research highlights that effective teaching is fundamental to the learning process and that the principal's leadership plays a significant role in influencing teacher performance (Sarifudin, 2019; Ramly, 2017). Principals must therefore foster a supportive environment that promotes teacher development and motivation to improve educational outcomes (Muspawi, 2021). This connection between principal leadership and teacher performance reinforces the need for effective administrative practices to enhance educational quality.

The literature underscores the essential role of educational administration and leadership in improving teacher performance and achieving educational goals. Effective school principals and initiatives like Guru Penggerak are crucial for driving educational improvements and creating a supportive environment conducive to both teacher and student success.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative descriptive research methodology to thoroughly examine the role of the school principal as a teacher facilitator and its impact on teacher performance at UPTD SD Negeri 360 Anabanua, Maniangpajo District, Wajo Regency. Scheduled from February to April 2024, the research aims to provide a nuanced understanding of how principal leadership influences teacher effectiveness.

Research Methods and Data Collection

The research employs a multi-method approach to gather comprehensive data. Interviews are conducted using structured guides tailored for different informants, including the school principal, teachers, and a supervisor. These interviews aim to capture detailed insights into the principal's leadership strategies, methods for motivating teachers, and feedback mechanisms. Observations are performed using checklists to document principal-teacher interactions, classroom dynamics, and the overall school environment. This method helps in understanding the practical implications of leadership practices. Document analysis involves reviewing school policies, program records, and performance data to provide context and background to the qualitative findings.

Data analysis follows a rigorous process. Data reduction involves summarizing and focusing on key findings from interviews, observations, and documents. Data

display organizes these findings into clear formats such as tables and charts, which facilitate understanding and interpretation. Finally, drawing and verification of conclusions ensures that the research findings are credible and supported by evidence.

Validity Measures

To ensure the validity of the research, triangulation is employed. This involves cross-checking data from various sources, using different techniques, and collecting information at multiple times. Internal validity is maintained through detailed analysis, while external validity is assessed by evaluating the generalizability of the findings to similar educational contexts. The methodological framework is visually represented in the following Figure:

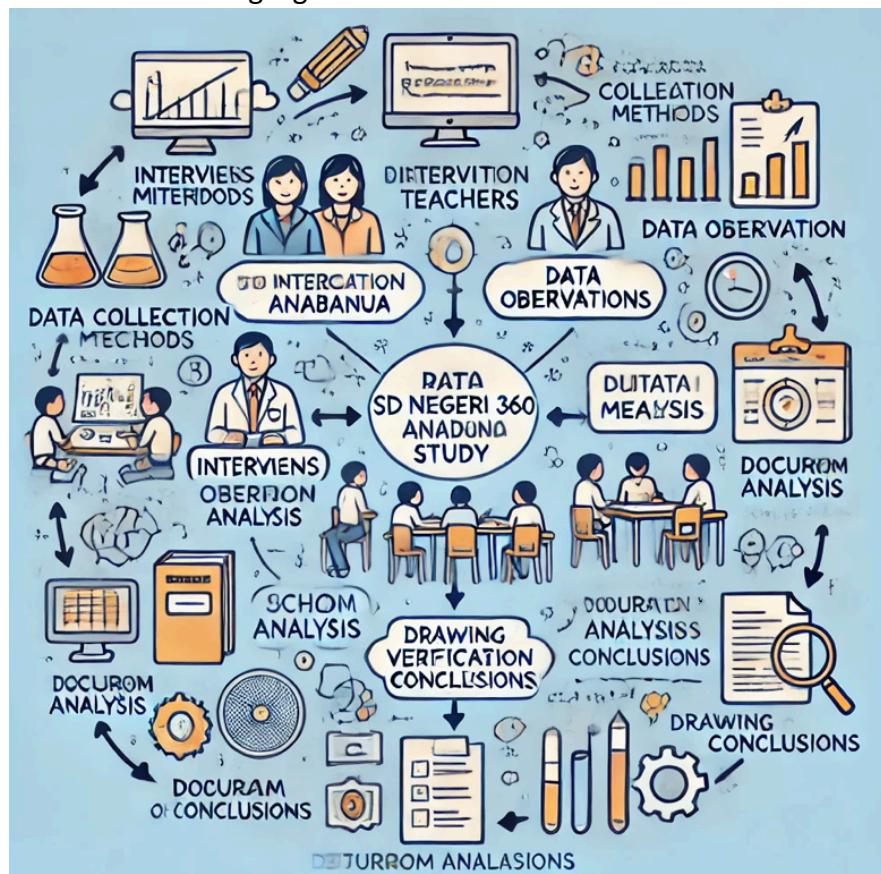


Figure 1. The Methodological Framework

Figure 1 illustrates the procedural steps of data collection and analysis for this study, providing a clear and structured overview of the research process. The study employs a qualitative descriptive research methodology to investigate the role of the school principal as a teacher facilitator and its impact on teacher performance at UPTD SD Negeri 360 Anabanua, Maniangpajo District, Wajo Regency.

The data collection process begins with interviews, where structured guides are used to gather in-depth information from various informants, including the school principal, selected teachers, and a supervisor. These interviews are designed to extract detailed insights into the principal's leadership strategies, methods of motivating teachers, and the feedback mechanisms employed. Following interviews, observations are conducted using detailed checklists. Observers document principal-teacher interactions, classroom dynamics, and overall school environment, which provides a practical view of how leadership practices are implemented and their effects on teaching and learning. Document analysis complements these methods by reviewing school policies, program records, and performance data to offer additional context and background for the qualitative findings.

The analysis of collected data involves several steps. Data reduction focuses on summarizing and distilling key information from interviews, observations, and documents. Data display organizes this summarized data into clear, accessible formats such as tables and charts, making it easier to interpret. The final step, drawing and verification of conclusions, involves synthesizing the findings to ensure they are supported by evidence and accurately reflect the research objectives.

This comprehensive approach aims to provide valuable insights into how effective principal leadership can enhance teacher performance and ultimately improve educational outcomes. By carefully documenting and analyzing these elements, the study seeks to contribute to a better understanding of leadership's impact on education.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This study examines the role of the school principal as a teacher facilitator and its impact on teacher performance at UPTD SD Negeri 360 Anabanua. Using a qualitative case study approach, in-depth interviews were conducted with the school principal and teachers, combined with direct observations. The data reveal that the principal plays a critical role in motivating, guiding, and providing professional support to teachers, significantly improving their performance.

The research findings clearly demonstrate that the principal at UPTD SD Negeri 360 Anabanua plays a pivotal role in enhancing teacher performance. Through a combination of motivation, constructive feedback, and collaboration, the principal fosters a supportive and growth-oriented work environment. Teachers feel valued and empowered to improve their teaching practices, resulting in a positive impact on both their performance and the overall quality of education at the school.

This case study highlights the importance of effective school leadership in driving teacher performance and professional development. By creating a culture of collaboration and providing individualized support, school principals can significantly influence the success of their teachers and, by extension, their students. The findings from this research may serve as a valuable reference for other schools looking to improve teacher performance through leadership practices.

The Role of the School Principal in Teacher Development

One of the central findings is that the school principal acts as a "teacher mover" — a leader who inspires, mentors, and facilitates professional development for teachers. Through regular communication, the principal ensures that teachers receive ongoing feedback and guidance tailored to their needs. The principal, in an interview, mentioned, "I conduct observations on teacher performance both administratively and through their teaching practices. This helps me identify areas where they can improve, and I provide recommendations based on those observations."

This proactive approach helps teachers feel supported and valued. By regularly assessing teacher performance, the principal not only identifies areas for growth but also celebrates achievements, which boosts teacher morale.

Motivation Strategies Employed by the Principal

The principal employs several strategies to motivate teachers and encourage them to perform at their best. One of the key methods is verbal motivation, where the principal highlights the strengths of each teacher and assigns tasks that align with their potential. "I provide assignments according to their strengths and continue to accompany them in their professional development," the principal explained. This personalized approach ensures that each teacher feels recognized and empowered to contribute to the school's success. Furthermore, the principal has created a collaborative culture by establishing learning communities. These communities serve as a platform for teachers to share best practices and work together to solve problems. One teacher, Muhammad Saidi, stated, "Using the learning community as a forum for sharing and learning together motivates us to continue innovating in our classroom practices." This sense of collaboration fosters a supportive environment, encouraging teachers to take risks and explore new teaching methods.

Providing Constructive Feedback

Another important aspect of the principal's role is providing constructive feedback. The principal facilitates this through regular discussions with the teachers, both formally and informally. "We hold meetings at the beginning, middle, and end of each month to discuss challenges and identify areas for improvement," the principal explained. These discussions help the teachers reflect on their performance and consider new strategies for enhancing their teaching effectiveness.

In addition to formal meetings, the principal engages with teachers through casual conversations, where many challenges and concerns are discussed. "Sometimes, these conversations reveal issues that are not apparent in formal settings, allowing us to address them more effectively," the principal added. This informal communication strengthens the bond between the principal and the teachers, ensuring that the principal remains aware of the teachers' needs and concerns.

One of the teachers, Mastura, shared her experience of receiving feedback from the principal: "Every performance we deliver is appreciated by the principal, and he gives us the opportunity to continue learning and developing ourselves." This combination of appreciation and feedback creates a growth-oriented atmosphere where teachers are encouraged to improve continuously.

Creating a Collaborative Work Environment

The research findings also highlight how the principal fosters a collaborative work environment at UPTD SD Negeri 360 Anabanua. School programs are designed to involve all teachers, allowing them to work together in implementing the school's goals. According to the principal, "Each program is assigned to a responsible teacher based on their potential, and it is carried out collaboratively by involving all existing assets in the school." This ensures that teachers have the opportunity to work closely with one another, leading to greater innovation and teamwork.

Collaboration is not limited to formal programs but also occurs organically through day-to-day interactions among teachers. One of the teachers commented, "The principal has created a space where we can freely exchange ideas and learn from each other. This has helped us become more cohesive as a team." This supportive environment enhances the quality of teaching and fosters a positive work culture.

Identifying and Overcoming Obstacles

One of the most challenging aspects of the principal's role is identifying and addressing the obstacles that hinder teacher performance. The principal uses both direct and indirect methods to do this. "I hold regular meetings at the beginning, middle, and end of each month, where teachers are encouraged to share the challenges they face," the principal said. By creating a space for open discussion, the principal ensures that potential issues are addressed early on.

In addition, the principal conducts informal discussions with teachers, which often reveal challenges that may not be shared in formal meetings. "Sometimes, casual conversations bring up personal or professional challenges that the teachers may not feel comfortable sharing in a formal setting," the principal noted. These informal interactions allow the principal to provide individualized support, whether through mentoring, facilitation, or consultation.

To overcome these obstacles, the principal works closely with the teachers, offering solutions tailored to their specific challenges. One teacher mentioned, "The principal is always there to guide us through difficulties, whether it's related to classroom management, lesson planning, or personal matters. His support has been invaluable." This hands-on approach helps teachers feel empowered to overcome obstacles and perform at their best.

The Principal's Leadership Influence on Teacher Motivation and Performance

The leadership style of the school principal at UPTD SD Negeri 360 Anabanua significantly impacts teacher motivation and performance. Teachers reported that the

principal's open communication, encouragement, and support make them feel motivated to improve their teaching practices. One teacher, Hj. Rahmawati, stated, "The principal's leadership greatly influences our motivation. He provides us with the recognition and support we need to improve our performance."

This positive impact extends beyond individual teachers. The principal's leadership has created a school culture that values professional development, collaboration, and continuous improvement. As one teacher commented, "We are constantly encouraged to reflect on our practices and find ways to improve, not just for ourselves but for the benefit of our students."

Principal leadership improves teacher performance through support and collaboration: an Elaboration of Relevant Theories and Previous Studies

The results of this study highlight that the role of the school principal as a teacher mover has a significant impact on improving teacher performance at UPTD SD Negeri 360 Anabanua. The principal not only serves as an administrative leader but also acts as a facilitator who actively supports teachers' professional development. This aligns with educational leadership theories, particularly transformational leadership theory, which emphasizes the importance of a leader in inspiring and motivating subordinates to achieve higher performance levels (Kilag & Sasan, 2023). This study also supports the view that effective leadership encourages teachers to continually improve their skills, ultimately enhancing the quality of education in schools.

The school principal at UPTD SD Negeri 360 Anabanua adopts an approach that focuses on the strengths of individual teachers and provides personalized support for their development. This strategy reflects situational leadership theory, which suggests that leadership style should be adjusted according to the readiness and capabilities of teachers (Kadiyono, et al., 2020). As one teacher stated, "The principal assigns tasks based on our strengths and always provides opportunities for us to grow." This approach helps teachers reach their maximum potential and improves the quality of teaching in the classroom.

In addition, motivation plays a key role in teacher performance. The principal at UPTD SD Negeri 360 Anabanua actively provides verbal motivation and forms learning communities as a platform for sharing best practices. These communities allow teachers to collaborate in addressing learning challenges and finding innovative solutions to enhance student learning. Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory emphasizes the importance of fulfilling psychological needs and recognition to encourage individuals to reach self-actualization (Schoofs, et al., 2022). In this context, the principal provides recognition for teachers' achievements and creates an environment that supports their professional development. One teacher stated, "The learning community motivates us to keep innovating in developing classroom learning."

Leadership that emphasizes providing constructive feedback also plays an important role in the principal's strategy to improve teacher performance. According to feedback intervention theory (Wisniewski, et al., 2020), effective feedback is specific to behavior and provided in detail. The principal gives feedback based on direct observations of teachers' instructional practices, allowing them to understand areas that need improvement. "The feedback from the principal helps us continuously improve ourselves," said one teacher. This is consistent with Pitt, et al., (2020) research, which shows that constructive feedback can significantly enhance individual performance. Furthermore, the principal also plays a role in creating a collaborative work environment where teachers can share experiences and knowledge. Through the application of distributed leadership theory (Brauckmann, et al., 2023), the principal encourages teachers to work together in designing and implementing school programs. This not only increases teachers' sense of ownership but also generates new ideas and innovations in teaching. One teacher remarked, "The principal has created a space where we are free to exchange ideas and learn from each other." Research by Kallio & Halverson (2020) also shows that distributed leadership fosters greater innovation in school environments.

Identifying and resolving obstacles faced by teachers is also an important focus of the principal's leadership. The principal uses a collaborative approach to overcome barriers that hinder teacher performance, involving them in the problem-solving process. This aligns with problem-solving leadership theory (Homan, et al., 2020), which asserts that an effective leader must proactively identify problems and work together with staff to find solutions. One teacher revealed, "Through regular meetings, we can discuss the obstacles we face, and the principal helps us find solutions." This approach fosters an environment that supports teachers' professional growth.

The leadership of the school principal at UPTD SD Negeri 360 Anabanua has successfully fostered a positive school culture. The principal has created a collaborative work climate where teachers feel supported and motivated to continue learning and developing. This is consistent with organizational culture theory by Črešnar & Nedelko (2020), which states that leaders play a key role in shaping values, beliefs, and behaviors within an organization. This positive school culture encourages teachers to innovate and continually improve their performance, ultimately contributing to better student learning outcomes.

This study supports the view that effective leadership in education extends beyond administrative aspects and involves active roles in teacher development. Principals who can provide motivation, constructive feedback, and create collaborative environments are able to significantly drive improvements in teacher performance. These findings are consistent with previous research emphasizing the importance of the principal's role in creating a school culture that supports teacher professional development and enhances the quality of education.

CONCLUSION

The role of the principal as a driving teacher at UPTD SD Negeri 360 Anabanua, Maniangpajo District, Wajo Regency, has been proven to have a significant positive impact on improving teacher performance. The principal's ability to provide support, recognition, and foster collaboration among teachers plays a critical role in motivating teachers to improve their teaching practices. Additionally, effective management of school resources, such as time, energy, and materials, combined with regular performance evaluations, allows teachers to identify areas for improvement and work towards enhancing their professional competencies.

The implications of this research emphasize the crucial role that principals play in not only leading but also facilitating the development of their teachers. By prioritizing collaboration, continuous learning, and strategic resource management, school leaders can significantly influence the overall quality of education. These findings can serve as a guide for educational policymakers and administrators to focus on training school principals in leadership and teacher development.

Practically, school principals are encouraged to maintain regular communication with teachers, conduct performance evaluations, and provide constructive feedback to support professional growth. Establishing learning communities where teachers can share ideas and collaborate is also essential for creating a conducive learning environment. From a theoretical perspective, future studies could investigate the long-term effects of principal leadership on both teacher performance and student outcomes, and explore how leadership styles vary across different educational settings.

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