

Principal Leadership as a Supporting Factor for Teacher Performance in the Implementation of the Independent Curriculum at SMP Negeri Unggul Sigli

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the role of principal leadership in supporting the performance of Driving Teachers in implementing the Independent Curriculum at SMP Negeri Unggul Sigli. Using a qualitative case study approach, data were collected through interviews, observations, and documentation involving principals, Driving Teachers, non-Driving Teachers, and students. The findings reveal that principals adopt a transformational leadership style by providing motivation, mentoring, and learning facilities, enhancing teacher performance in project-based learning, collaboration, and technology use. Principals also foster a collaborative school culture, strengthening curriculum implementation. Challenges include limited understanding among non-Driving Teachers, time constraints, and budget limitations. The study highlights the need for training, resource optimization, and effective leadership to ensure sustainable curriculum implementation.

INTRODUCTION

The leadership of school principals has a strategic role in determining the direction and quality of education in an institution (Khosiah & Maryani, 2020). In the context of education in Indonesia, the principal is not only an administrator, but also a leader who is able to inspire, direct, and motivate all elements of the school (Jelantik, 2015). This role is increasingly crucial in efforts to implement the Independent Curriculum, an education policy that demands a more flexible, innovative, and student-centered approach. As the main implementer at the school level, school principals are required to create an environment that supports teachers in implementing these policies.

Guru Penggerak, as one of the flagship programs of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemendikbudristek), is the main actor in supporting the transformation of education in schools (Mulyasa, 2021). Driving Teachers are expected to be able to be the engine of change, an agent of innovation, and an example in the learning process based on the Independent Curriculum. However, their success is inseparable from the leadership support of the principal who acts as a facilitator, supervisor, as well as a policy maker. The synergistic relationship between the principal and the Driving Teacher greatly determines the effectiveness of the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in schools.

SMP Negeri Unggul Sigli is one of the examples of schools that are serious in implementing the Independent Curriculum. As a flagship school, this institution has the challenge of continuing to improve the quality of education as well as becoming a model for other schools around it. In this context, the leadership of the principal at SMP Negeri Unggul Sigli is an important factor that needs to be studied more deeply. How school principals are able to support and motivate Teachers in carrying out their roles is the main question to be answered in this study.

The Independent Curriculum offers a learning approach that gives teachers and students the freedom to determine the learning process that suits their respective potentials and needs (Wardana et al., 2023). This approach requires solid collaboration between principals and teachers. School principals must ensure the availability of conducive facilities, training, and work environments. In addition, school principals must also be able to build a school culture that supports innovation, so that Driving Teachers feel supported in exploring new ideas.

Various studies show that the leadership style of school principals has a direct impact on teacher performance. Participatory and transformational leadership, for example, has been shown to improve teacher motivation and performance (Azis & Suwatno, 2019). On the other hand, unsupportive leadership is often an obstacle to the implementation of educational innovation. In the context of SMP Negeri Unggul Sigli, an analysis of the principal's leadership style and its impact on the performance of the Driving Teacher will provide a real picture of the factors that support the successful implementation of the Independent Curriculum.

The leadership of the principal includes not only the managerial aspect, but also the humanist aspect. Principals must be able to understand the

individual needs of each teacher, including Teachers of Mobility who have unique challenges in their roles (Maryati & Hanggara, 2022). This understanding is important to create a sense of mutual trust and harmonious cooperation in the school environment. In addition, school principals must also be the link between the big vision of the Independent Curriculum and its implementation in the field.

The main challenge in implementing the Independent Curriculum is to ensure that all parties in the school understand and support the policy. The principal has a great responsibility to socialize the Independent Curriculum to all elements of the school, including Driving Teachers, other teachers, students, and parents. This process requires effective communication and an inclusive approach so that all parties feel involved.

Driving teachers have a strategic role in creating change in schools, but their role will be difficult to maximize without the support of the principal. As actors on the front lines, Driving Teachers need space to innovate, experiment, and share good practices (Ritonga et al., 2022). This is where the role of the principal as a visionary leader becomes very important. Principals who are able to provide space for movement to Driving Teachers will create a dynamic and productive work atmosphere.

At SMP Negeri Unggul Sigli, the implementation of the Independent Curriculum is one of the top priorities. With a significant number of Driving Teachers, the school has great potential to be a pioneer of educational change in its area. However, this potential must be managed properly through effective principal leadership. Principals need to ensure that Driving Teachers have access to the resources, training, and support they need to carry out their roles.

This study aims to explore more deeply how the leadership of the principal at SMP Negeri Unggul Sigli affects the performance of Driving Teachers in the implementation of the Independent Curriculum. The main focus of the research is to identify the principal's leadership style, the form of support provided to the Driving Teacher, and the challenges faced in the process. The results of this study are expected to provide practical recommendations for other schools that want to adopt a similar approach.

In the process of implementing the Independent Curriculum, collaboration between the principal and the Driving Teacher is very important. This collaboration not only covers technical aspects, but also aspects of values and work culture. Principals who are able to build an inclusive and supportive work environment will help Driving Teachers achieve their best performance. On the other hand, school principals who are less responsive to the needs of Teacher Mobilizers have the potential to be an obstacle in the educational transformation process.

The success of the implementation of the Independent Curriculum is not only determined by national policies, but also by how the policies are translated at the school level. The principal holds the main key in this process. With effective leadership, school principals can bridge the big vision of the Independent Curriculum with real practice in the classroom.

One of the indicators of the success of the principal's leadership is the ability to manage change. The Independent Curriculum is an innovation that demands a paradigm shift in the way of learning and teaching. The principal must be able to lead this change process with a systematic and humane approach.

The experience at SMP Negeri Unggul Sigli shows that the principal's support to the Driving Teacher can improve the quality of learning. Teachers who feel supported tend to be more innovative and enthusiastic in carrying out their duties. These findings show the importance of the role of school principals in creating an educational ecosystem that supports innovation.

However, the implementation of the Independent Curriculum also faces various challenges, such as resistance to change, limited resources, and lack of training. The principal must have a strategy to overcome these challenges so that the program can run as planned. At SMP Negeri Unggul Sigli, the principal has implemented various initiatives to support Teacher Mobilizers, such as providing intensive training and building a collaborative work culture.

Considering the complexity of the role of school principals, this study seeks to provide a comprehensive picture of the relationship between principal leadership and teacher performance. This study is not only relevant for SMP Negeri Unggul Sigli, but also for other schools that are trying to implement the Independent Curriculum.

It is hoped that the results of this research can be a reference for policy makers, school principals, and driving teachers in improving the quality of education in Indonesia. With strong leadership and the right support, the implementation of the Independent Curriculum can be a big step towards a more inclusive, innovative, and globally competitive education.

Through this research, it is hoped that a better understanding will be created about how school principals can become strategic partners for Teacher Mobilizers in bringing positive change in schools. The synergistic relationship between the two parties will be the key to the success of educational transformation in the era of the Independent Curriculum.

THEORETICAL REVIEW

The leadership of the principal is one of the important elements in creating a quality educational environment. According to (Judge & Robbins, 2013), leadership is the ability to influence an individual or group to achieve organizational goals. In the context of education, the leadership of school principals includes various aspects, such as managerial skills, human resource development, and the application of values that support a positive work culture. (Syahril, 2019) stated that effective leadership is able to create a conducive work environment, empower teachers, and encourage innovation in learning.

In education, the leadership style of school principals is often a variable that is studied because it has a significant impact on teacher performance. (Eberly et al., 2017) put forward the theory of transformational leadership, which emphasizes the importance of leaders to inspire, motivate, and empower subordinates. This leadership style is relevant to the demands of the

Independent Curriculum which requires innovation and creativity in the learning process. Research by Leithwood and Sun in (TALEBLOO, 2015) It shows that school principals with transformational leadership styles are able to improve teacher motivation and performance, especially in the context of changing education policies.

In addition, the principal's leadership also influences the school culture. (Iskandar, 2013) explained that the principal is an agent of change who plays a role in shaping the vision, values, and norms that support the success of the school. Principals who successfully create a collaborative culture will encourage teachers to work together and share good practices. In the context of implementing the Independent Curriculum, a supportive work culture is very important so that Driving Teachers can carry out their roles optimally.

Teacher Mobilizers are a key element in the transformation of education in Indonesia. The Driving Teacher Program launched by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology aims to produce teachers who have leadership competencies, innovation, and collaboration. According to Permendikbud Number 57 of 2020 concerning Driving Teachers (Mulyasa, 2021), they are tasked with being the driving force of change in schools, including in implementing the Independent Curriculum. However, the success of Guru Mandal relies heavily on the support of the principal as a strategic partner in change.

The Independent Curriculum is an educational policy that aims to provide flexibility to teachers and students in the learning process. According to (Directorate of Elementary Schools, Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology of the Republic of Indonesia, 2021), The Independent Curriculum is designed to strengthen students' ability to think critically, collaborate, and innovate. The implementation of this curriculum requires the active role of teachers to design learning that suits the needs of students. In this case, the principal acts as a facilitator who ensures that curriculum policies can be implemented properly at the school level.

Previous research has shown a close relationship between principal leadership and successful curriculum implementation. Study conducted by (Susanto & Muhyadi, 2016) It shows that effective principals are able to integrate the curriculum vision into daily practice in schools. They also found that principal support for teachers' professional development is a key factor in improving the quality of learning.

On the other hand, challenges in the implementation of the Independent Curriculum are also a concern. According to (Mulyasa, 2017), the main obstacles in the implementation of the new curriculum are the lack of teachers' understanding of the policy, limited training, and lack of infrastructure support. In this context, the principal has the responsibility to provide the resources needed as well as establish effective communication between teachers, students, and parents.

At SMP Negeri Unggul Sigli, Driving Teachers play an important role in supporting the implementation of the Independent Curriculum. As agents of change, they need consistent guidance and support from the principal. Based

on the theory of situational leadership put forward by Hersey and Blanchard in (Raza & Sikandar, 2018), principals need to adapt their approach to the level of competence and motivation of the Driving Teacher. With this approach, principals can provide more effective support according to the individual needs of teachers.

In addition to the leadership of the principal, the organizational culture factor is also an important element in supporting the implementation of the Independent Curriculum. (Schein, 2010) Explain that organizational culture includes values, beliefs, and practices shared by organizational members. In the context of schools, an inclusive and innovative organizational culture will encourage Driving Teachers to experiment and develop new learning methods.

METHODOLOGY

This study uses a qualitative descriptive approach with the aim of describing in depth the leadership role of school principals in supporting the performance of Driving Teachers in the implementation of the Independent Curriculum at SMP Negeri Unggul Sigli. This approach was chosen because it was able to comprehensively explore complex social phenomena, especially the relationship between the leadership of school principals and the performance of Driving Teachers.

Type of Research

This research is a qualitative research with the type of case study (Assyakurrohim et al., 2023). The case study was chosen to gain a deep understanding of the phenomenon that is happening in a certain context, namely at SMP Negeri Unggul Sigli. The focus of the research is directed at how the principal supports the performance of the Driving Teacher in the implementation of the Independent Curriculum.

Location and Subject of Research

The location of the research is SMP Negeri Unggul Sigli, which has implemented the Independent Curriculum. Research subjects include:

- a) The principal as the main leader who plays a role in policy-making and coaching of Driving Teachers.
- b) Driving Teachers who serve as agents of change in the implementation of the Independent Curriculum.
- c) Non-Teachers Driving Teachers, school staff, and School Supervisors as supporters and beneficiaries of the impact of policy implementation.

Data Collection Techniques

To obtain comprehensive data, several data collection techniques are used (Jogiyanto Hartono, 2018) that is:

- a. In-Depth Interviews
 1. It was carried out with the principal to understand the roles, strategies, and challenges faced in supporting the Driving Teachers.

2. Interviews were also conducted with Driving Teachers to find out their experiences, support received, and obstacles faced in implementing the Independent Curriculum.
- b. Participatory Observation
 1. The researcher made direct observations on the activities of the principal and the Driving Teacher, including the learning process and interaction between the principal, teachers, and students.
 2. Observations were focused on communication patterns, support provided by the principal, and the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in the classroom.
- c. Documentation
 1. Supporting data such as school policy documents, principal's work plans, teacher driving activity reports, and other relevant documents were analyzed to complete the interview and observation data.

Research Instruments

The main instrument in this study is the researcher himself (human instrument). Researchers act as data collectors, analysts, and interpreters (Miles & Huberman, 1992). In addition, interview guidelines, observation lists, and documentation formats are used to ensure that the data obtained is relevant to the research objectives.

Data Analysis Techniques

The data obtained were analyzed using thematic analysis techniques consisting of several stages:

- a. Data Collection: All data from interviews, observations, and documentation are collected systematically.
- b. Data Reduction, irrelevant data are eliminated, while the main data is classified based on themes such as the role of the principal, forms of support, and challenges of Driving Teachers.
- c. Data Presentation, Reduced data is presented in the form of a descriptive narrative to provide a clear picture of the phenomenon being studied.
- d. Conclusions: Conclusions are drawn based on patterns found in the data, to answer the focus of the research and achieve the objectives of the research.

Data Validity

The validity of the data is tested through several techniques, namely:

- a. Data Triangulation
Using various data sources (interviews, observations, documentation) to ensure consistency of information.
- b. Member Check
Confirm the results of the interviews and interpret the data to the respondents to ensure the correctness of the information.
- c. Audit Trail

Documentation of the research process in detail to maintain transparency and accuracy of data.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

The results of this study describe the relationship between the leadership of the principal and the performance of the Driving Teacher in the implementation of the Independent Curriculum at SMP Negeri Unggul Sigli. Data were obtained through in-depth interviews, participatory observations, and document analysis. This research produced the main findings presented based on the following themes:

Principal Leadership Style

The results of interviews and observations show that the principal at SMP Negeri Unggul Sigli applies a transformational leadership style. School principals often provide inspiration and motivation to Driving Teachers through regular meetings, group discussions, and giving awards for innovations carried out.

Table 1. School Principal's Support for Driving Teachers

Forms of Support	Frequency (months)	Description
Provision of training and workshops	2 times	The principal invited the facilitator to improve the understanding of the Driving Teacher.
Individual discussion and mentoring	4 times	The principal held a special session to hear the challenges and ideas of the Driving Teacher.
Procurement of facilities and infrastructure	As needed	Provision of digital learning devices such as projectors, internet, and module books.

Observations show that school principals are often inclusive, involving Teacher Mobilizers in decision-making related to learning. This strengthens their role as agents of change in schools.

Performance of Driving Teachers

Driving teachers show positive performance in the implementation of the Independent Curriculum. Based on the interview, Guru Penggerak felt supported by the principal in developing creative and innovative learning methods. The following are the results of the performance assessment of Driving Teachers based on learning observations:

Table 2. Performance Assessment of Driving Teachers Based on Observation

Performance Aspects	Average Score (1-5)	Observation Indicators
Innovation in learning	4.5	The use of project-based learning methods and discussions.
Collaborate with peers	4.2	Active involvement in sharing good practices in teacher forums.
Utilization of learning technology	4.0	Use of digital apps like Kahoot and Canva.

Driving Teachers also have a positive impact on students, especially in increasing student engagement during learning.

Challenges in the Implementation of the Independent Curriculum

Despite much progress, this study found a number of challenges faced by Teacher Movers and school principals, namely:

Lack of understanding of non-Driving Teachers: Non-Driving Teachers still need additional training to understand the philosophy and practice of the Independent Curriculum.

Limited time for innovation: Driving Teachers often struggle to divide their time between administrative tasks and the development of innovative learning.

Budget limitations: The provision of innovative learning support facilities is still limited due to the limited school budget.

Supportive School Culture

The principal succeeded in creating a collaborative work culture. Based on the results of observations, the work atmosphere at SMP Negeri Unggul Sigli encourages Teacher Mobilizers to share ideas and support each other. This is shown through:

1. Collaborative monthly meetings: Discuss learning innovation constraints and opportunities.
2. Improved relationships between teachers: Through informal discussion forums and joint projects.

The results of this study show that the leadership of the principal plays an important role in supporting the performance of Driving Teachers in the implementation of the Independent Curriculum at SMP Negeri Unggul Sigli. This finding is in line with the transformational leadership theory put forward by (Rustamaji et al., 2017), where effective leaders are able to inspire, motivate, and empower their subordinates to achieve common goals. In this study, school principals demonstrate transformational leadership styles through support in the form of training, mentoring, and the provision of relevant learning facilities.

The principal at SMP Negeri Unggul Sigli plays a strategic role as a facilitator and agent of change. (BK, 2019) explained that transformational

leadership can improve teachers' motivation and performance, especially in the face of new policies such as the Independent Curriculum. The principal at this school not only provides direction, but also creates a conducive work environment, including through regular meetings that are collaborative. This allows the Driving Teacher to share ideas, explore new methods, and overcome obstacles together.

The support of the school principal has an impact on the performance of Teacher Mobilizers which is shown in the aspects of learning innovation, collaboration, and technology utilization. The observation results show that Teacher Mobilizers are able to apply project-based learning and discussion methods that actively involve students. These findings reinforce the view (Judge & Robbins, 2013), which states that effective leaders can empower their teams to achieve better results through innovation and collaboration.

However, this study also found challenges in the implementation of the Independent Curriculum, such as lack of understanding of non-Driving Teachers, limited time for innovation, and lack of budget. This obstacle is similar to the findings (Mulyasa, 2017), which stated that the main obstacle in the implementation of the new education policy is the limitation of training, resources, and time. In this case, the principal at SMP Negeri Unggul Sigli has tried to mitigate these challenges by providing training and supporting facilities.

A collaborative school culture is one of the significant supporting factors. The principal succeeded in creating an inclusive work atmosphere, where the Driving Teacher felt supported to innovate. This is in accordance with the theory of organizational culture (Schein, 2010), which states that a positive work culture can improve individual and organizational performance. At SMP Negeri Unggul Sigli, regular meetings and informal discussion forums are a forum to strengthen collaboration between teachers, so that they can learn from each other and share experiences.

The principal's support in the technical and emotional aspects of Teacher Mobilizer also reflects the situational approach put forward by the (Kurniawati et al., 2020). The principal adapts his approach to the individual needs of teachers, such as providing individual mentoring for Driving Teachers who face certain obstacles. This approach has proven to be effective in increasing the confidence and competence of Driving Teachers.

In addition, the implementation of the Independent Curriculum which requires flexibility and innovation in learning provides new challenges for Driving Teachers. (Salsabila et al., 2023) emphasizing the importance of the role of school principals in integrating the curriculum vision into learning practices. In this study, the principal at SMP Negeri Unggul Sigli has succeeded in ensuring that the Driving Teacher understands the philosophy of the Independent Curriculum and applies it through relevant learning methods.

However, there is still a gap between Driving Teachers and non-Driving Teachers in understanding and implementing the Independent Curriculum. This shows the need to expand training and mentoring that is not only focused on Driving Teachers, but also on all teachers in schools. Thus, all parties can contribute optimally in improving the quality of learning.

Overall, this study supports the view that effective principal leadership is the key to success in the implementation of education policies. By optimizing principal support and strengthening a culture of collaboration, Guru Penggerak is able to carry out its role as an agent of change, although challenges remain. The contribution of this research provides practical recommendations to increase the effectiveness of the implementation of the Independent Curriculum through inclusive and collaborative leadership.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study concludes that the leadership of the principal plays a very important role in supporting the performance of the Driving Teacher in the implementation of the Independent Curriculum at SMP Negeri Unggul Sigli. Principals who apply transformational leadership styles have succeeded in creating a collaborative work environment, providing motivation, and empowering Driving Teachers to innovate in learning. The principal's support includes the provision of training, individual mentoring, and learning facilities, which directly contribute to the success of Teacher Mobilizers in implementing the Independent Curriculum. Driving teachers show good performance, especially in terms of learning innovation, collaboration with peers, and the use of technology. They are able to apply learning methods that are in accordance with the philosophy of the Independent Curriculum, such as project-based learning and approaches that actively involve students. However, challenges such as the lack of understanding of non-Driving Teachers, limited time for innovation, and lack of budget are still obstacles in the implementation of this policy. An inclusive and collaborative school culture is also an important supporting factor in supporting Teacher Mobilizers. The principal has succeeded in creating a work environment that supports collaboration and sharing of experiences, so that the entire school community can support each other in facing challenges. The situational approach used by principals in tailoring support to the individual needs of Teacher Mobilizers has also proven to be effective in improving their confidence and performance. This research strengthens leadership theories such as transformational and situational, as well as the relevance of organizational culture in supporting the success of education policies. Although there are still obstacles, the results of this study show that effective leadership of school principals can be the key to overcoming these obstacles. Thus, to increase the success of the implementation of the Independent Curriculum, it is recommended that schools continue to strengthen the support of school principals, expand training to all teachers, and ensure adequate resource allocation. This is expected to encourage the creation of wider innovations in learning, so that the goal of the Independent Curriculum to improve the quality of education can be achieved to the maximum.

FURTHER STUDY

Future research could examine the impact of principal leadership on non-Driving Teachers, focusing on strategies to enhance their understanding and involvement in the Independent Curriculum. Longitudinal studies could assess the sustainability of transformational leadership on teacher performance and student outcomes, while research on school organizational culture could explore how collaborative environments enhance curriculum implementation. Investigating budget allocation and resource management may offer insights into overcoming financial constraints for effective teaching innovations. Additionally, studies on technology integration could identify best practices for using digital tools in student-centered learning. Comparative research across schools and intervention-based studies on teacher training could evaluate the effectiveness of leadership styles and professional development. Incorporating student perspectives would also provide valuable insights into the impact of teacher innovations on engagement and outcomes. These studies would contribute to a deeper understanding of the factors driving the successful implementation of the Independent Curriculum.

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