

Instructional Leadership of School Principals in Improving Teaching Performance of Elementary School Teachers

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Abstract

The quality of basic education in Indonesia remains constrained by unresolved structural issues reflected in uneven teacher competence, weak academic supervision, and ineffective policy implementation resulting in suboptimal teaching performance at the elementary level and highlighting the urgent need for strengthened instructional leadership to bridge the gap between educational standards and classroom practice. This study aims to analyze the instructional leadership strategy of school principals in improving the teaching performance of elementary school teachers at SDN 2 Cianting, Plered District, Purwakarta Regency. The importance of this research is based on the need to respond to the problem of low teacher performance and learning quality at the basic education level in Indonesia. The research uses a qualitative approach with a case study method because it allows researchers to gain a comprehensive and contextual understanding of instructional leadership practices in a real school setting. The research informants include school principals, teachers, supervisors, and school committees. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observations, and documentation studies. The research instruments are in the form of interview guidelines and observation sheets, while data analysis is carried out through the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing which are validated using triangulation of sources, methods, and time. The results showed that principals implemented five key instructional leadership strategies, including: 1) Setting clear and contextual learning standards; 2) Implementing reflective and guiding academic supervision; 3) Develop teachers' professional capacity on an ongoing basis; 4) Building a culture of collaboration and teacher leadership; and 5) Strengthening communication, motivation, and school quality culture. The strategies implemented have been proven to strengthen pedagogic competence, learning innovation, and teacher motivation. The findings show a marked improvement in teacher performance in planning, implementing, and evaluating competency-based learning. Thus, instructional leadership plays a crucial role in building a school professional culture and the quality of continuing education, thus requiring policy support and systematic leadership training.

Keywords: Instructional leadership; Principal; Teacher performance; Elementary school

Introduction

The quality of basic education in Indonesia still reflects structural problems that have not been resolved and continues to be a national strategic agenda. These problems are not only reflected in the low quality of the learning process in elementary schools, but also from the inequality of teacher competence between regions, the weak academic supervision function, and the ineffective implementation of policies aimed at improving teacher professionalism (Hernawan & Bosra, 2020). The government has actually formulated a

comprehensive regulatory framework, including through Law Number 14 of 2005 concerning Teachers and Lecturers and Regulation of the Minister of National Education Number 16 of 2007 concerning Academic Qualification Standards and Teacher Competencies, as an instrument to ensure the quality of learning practices (Haqiqi, 2019). However, the reality in the field, especially at the elementary school level, shows that the pedagogical performance of teachers is still far from the set professional standards. This situation confirms that there is a significant gap between the ideality of education policy and the effectiveness of its implementation at the level of education units (Muhartono, 2024).

Teachers' teaching performance not only represents technical abilities in preparing lesson plans, implementing teaching processes, and evaluating learning outcomes, but also reflects teachers' professional capacity in managing learning systematically, effectively, and oriented towards achieving educational goals (Hamidah & Supardi, 2024). In this context, teaching performance serves as a fundamental benchmark for the success of educational institutions, considering that the quality of learning in the classroom is highly dependent on the extent to which teachers are able to carry out their role not only as material presenters, but as active learning facilitators and motivators of student development. Therefore, improving teacher teaching performance cannot be seen as limited to efforts to meet administrative standards within the framework of the National Education Standards, but as an essential strategy to ensure the formation of students who have the capacity to think creatively, have ethical integrity, and adequate competitiveness in responding to increasingly complex global dynamics and demands (Addin et al., 2020).

Teachers with effective teaching performance are not only characterized by mastery of pedagogic competence and the substance of teaching materials, but also by the ability to transform this knowledge into creative, communicative, and reflective learning strategies. These characteristics include the ability to choose learning methods that are relevant to the needs of students, the ability to build meaningful pedagogical interactions, and consistency in conducting evaluation and reflection as the basis for continuous improvement (Setiawan et al., 2025). Quality teaching performance is also reflected in the achievement of learning objectives, high active student participation, and the application of innovative learning approaches that place students as the main subjects in the learning process (Taufik et al., 2025; Sittika et al., 2022; Kejora, 2019). These conditions implicitly require teachers to continue to develop their professionalism through continuous training, peer collaboration, and effective academic supervision.

However, the reality on the ground shows that the teaching performance of teachers at the elementary school level is still very variable. On the one hand, there are teachers who are able to present active, contextual, and meaningful learning; On the other hand, there are still many teachers who persist in conventional learning practices that emphasize memorization and lectures, lack of planning, and lack of systematic evaluation and follow-up (Heenan et al., 2023). This gap has a direct impact on low academic achievement, weak motivation to learn, and limited critical thinking skills of students. This situation indicates that the main problem does not lie solely in individual teachers, but in the lack of optimal management, coaching, and supervision of learning in elementary schools.

Teacher teaching performance gap can be understood as a multidimensional phenomenon that is influenced by a combination of internal and external factors. From an internal perspective, low work motivation, weak commitment to professionalism, and limited pedagogic competence are the dominant factors that hinder the optimization of the role of teachers in the learning process (Misbah, 2024). This condition shows that improving teacher performance does not quite depend solely on formal qualifications, but demands professional awareness and an intrinsic drive to continue to develop. Meanwhile, external factors also exacerbate the gap, including the leadership of school principals who are not yet learning-oriented, a less

conducive work environment, and limited access to sustainable professional development (Suci et al., 2023). The absence of a systematic instructional supervision system also causes teachers to lose direction of coaching and constructive feedback in improving teaching practices (Mogea, 2019).

Instructional leadership is a relevant strategic approach in responding to low teacher teaching performance, because it directly places learning at the core of school leadership. Principals with an instructional orientation not only play a role in administrative management, but actively build a vision of learning, monitor classroom teaching practices, provide constructive feedback, and facilitate teachers' professional development on an ongoing basis. This approach encourages the creation of a school culture that is reflective and oriented towards improving the quality of learning. Various empirical findings show that effective instructional leadership contributes significantly to increasing teacher motivation and the quality of the learning process in diverse educational contexts (Jones & Henry, 2022).

Although instructional leadership has been widely socialized, not all schools are able to implement it consistently. However, State Elementary School 2 Cianting, Purwakarta regency, is a positive example of best practice in implementing a directed and sustainable instructional leadership strategy that can improve teachers' teaching performance. The Principal of 1 Cianting State Elementary School in Purwakarta Regency routinely conducts academic supervision, provides reflective feedback, and creates a collaborative environment that supports learning innovation. This success shows the importance of leadership that is visionary, communicative, and oriented towards teacher competency development.

Departing from these problems, the study of instructional leadership strategies in improving the teaching performance of elementary school teachers is an academic and practical urgency that cannot be ignored. This research is directed to examine in depth the role, strategy, and implications of instructional leadership on improving the quality of learning processes and outcomes. The value of the novelty of the research lies in the contextual approach that examines the practice of instructional leadership in real life at SDN 2 Cianting, Purwakarta regency as a representation of effective leadership implementation. The research findings are expected to be able to enrich the theoretical treasure as well as become a practical reference for the development of sustainable educational leadership models in Indonesia.

Methodology

This study focuses on the instructional leadership strategy of school principals in improving the teaching performance of elementary school teachers at SDN 2 Cianting, Plered District, Purwakarta Regency. Using a qualitative approach through a case study method, this study seeks to uncover the dynamics of instructional leadership in depth and contextual. The selection of the case study method is based on its ability to capture the complexity of leadership practices and teacher teaching performance in real-world school situations. This approach allows for a comprehensive analysis of the interactions, strategies, and institutional contexts that shape the quality of learning (Gustafsson, 2024). SDN 2 Cianting, Purwakarta Regency, was chosen purposively because the principal showed a strong commitment to improving the quality of learning through the application of consistent instructional leadership. This commitment is reflected in the implementation of structured academic supervision, systematic efforts to strengthen teachers' pedagogic competence, and the creation of a conducive, collaborative, and quality-oriented learning environment. This condition makes SDN 2 Cianting a relevant and strategic context to examine instructional leadership practices, as well as allowing researchers to gain a deep understanding of the effectiveness of leadership strategies in encouraging improvement in teacher teaching performance.

Data collection in this study was carried out for 3 months from July 2025 to October 2025 through in-depth interviews, participatory observations, and documentation studies as a strategy to obtain a comprehensive and valid understanding (Gustafsson, 2024). The interview involves principals, teachers, and supervisors to explore in depth the instructional leadership strategies applied, ranging from learning planning, teacher professional development, to monitoring the teaching and learning process. Participatory observation is directed to directly identify the principal's leadership practices in motivating teachers, encouraging learning innovation, and building effective communication in the school environment. The documentation study includes analysis of school work programs, academic supervision results, and teacher performance reports as a form of data triangulation to increase the validity of research findings (Rahayu & Kejora, 2021; Kejora et al., 2024).

Data analysis in this study is carried out through the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing systematically within the framework of qualitative analysis. To ensure the validity of the findings, triangulation of sources, methods, and time was used as a data validation strategy (Khasanah et al., 2023). Through this process, the research is expected to be able to comprehensively reconstruct the instructional leadership mechanism of school principals in influencing the improvement of teacher teaching performance, both through continuous professional development, providing constructive feedback, and strengthening a collaborative work culture. The findings of this study are expected to serve as a conceptual and practical reference for other elementary schools in developing effective instructional leadership and have a direct impact on improving the quality of learning.

Results and Discussion

The findings of the study show that the principal of SDN 2 Cianting, Purwakarta Regency, implements instructional leadership systematically through the establishment of academic standards that are in line with the national curriculum and the contextual needs of students. The principal consistently leads the coordination forum at the beginning of the semester to ensure the same understanding of teachers on learning achievement targets and success indicators. Analysis of School Work Plans and academic supervision programs reveals a strong emphasis on competency-based learning and authentic assessments integrated into teacher learning planning. The results of observation and documentation also show the active role of school principals as instructional resources through continuous technical guidance, including innovative learning training and the use of digital media. This practice reflects a leadership orientation that places teacher professional development as the primary strategy for improving the quality of learning. In an interview, the principal said:

"I try to encourage teachers not only to focus on delivering material based on textbooks, but also to be able to understand the characteristics and learning needs of students. Supervision activities are not carried out to assess errors, but as a collaborative means of formulating solutions to learning problems. In addition, teachers are continuously encouraged to implement more innovative learning approaches, such as project-based learning and thematic literacy. Every month, joint reflection activities are carried out as an effort to continuously evaluate so that teachers can identify aspects of learning that need to be improved and developed."

The statement reflects the principal's strong commitment to fostering a professional learning culture in the school environment, as well as affirming the implementation of instructional leadership that is supportive, collaborative, and consistently directed at improving the quality of learning.

The findings of the study based on the results of observations and documentation studies show that SDN 2 Cianting, Purwakarta Regency, has succeeded in building a conducive, orderly, and child-friendly learning environment as an integral part of the principal's instructional leadership practice. The principal consistently instills the value of discipline and care through morning routines, such as welcoming students at the school

gate and giving simple appreciation to maintain the cleanliness of the classroom. Interaction between teachers shows a collaborative and mutually supportive work culture.

Analysis of school documents confirms the existence of strategic programs, such as Child-Friendly Schools and the Reflective Friday Movement, which are geared towards strengthening character and building positive communication between school residents. In addition, the principal continuously internalizes the school's vision and mission through various official forums, school communication media, and visual symbols in the classroom. This consistency clarifies the direction of school policies and contributes to the unification of teachers' commitment and work spirit in supporting the improvement of learning quality. A grade VI teacher in an interview stated:

"I feel that the principal really sets a real example in supporting the improvement of the quality of teacher teaching. When we had difficulties in compiling learning tools, he not only gave instructions, but also accompanied and assisted directly in the preparation of the lesson plans. I also felt his presence in the classroom as we tried to implement new learning methods, so we felt more confident and not afraid to make mistakes. Every shortcoming that arises is always conveyed through constructive and constructive input, so that the learning process becomes a shared learning space, not pressure."

The statement shows that the principal's leadership builds a working relationship based on mutual respect, trust, and professional support. This approach encourages teachers to be more motivated, confident, and committed to improving their competence and quality of teaching performance in an ongoing manner.

The findings of the study show that school principals consistently instill a culture of quality through setting clear and challenging performance expectations for teachers and students. The analysis of the performance evaluation document revealed that each teacher has measurable targets, both related to improving student learning outcomes and indicators of activeness in the learning process. In addition, the principal initiated the practice of peer review teaching as a professional learning mechanism, where teachers observe each other to share effective learning practices. This strategy not only strengthens professional accountability, but also fosters a sense of pride in the role and identity of teachers.

Furthermore, empirical findings show that school principals strategically develop teacher leadership through the provision of functional responsibilities, such as literacy coordinators, curriculum drivers, and new teacher companions. This system, as reflected in the school's organizational structure, smooths the internal communication flow and strengthens the sense of belonging to the institution. Principals interpret school success holistically, not only through academic achievement, but also through increased initiative, collaboration, and collective leadership of teachers.

In an interview session with the committee as a representative of one of the parents of the students said:

"We feel that empirically this school has a different climate than other schools. The principal has a direct and intense interaction with us as parents, and shows a quick response when obstacles arise in the child's learning process. In addition, the principal actively involved us through parenting activities and educational discussion forums. This openness and involvement makes us feel valued, heard, and an important part of efforts to improve the quality of education in schools."

These findings show that school principals implement participatory and open leadership strategies, thus creating positive relationships between schools and communities. While the school superintendent stated:

"The Principal of SDN 2 Cianting, Purwakarta Regency, is seen as a progressive figure in the Purwakarta area because he is able to maintain a balance between the function of supervision and teacher development. Based on the results of the supervision we conducted, it can be seen that there has been an improvement in teacher performance, especially in the aspects of learning planning and the implementation of teaching innovations. In addition, school principals consistently prepare systematic reflective reports, thus facilitating the process of assessing school development in an objective and sustainable manner."

This statement confirms that the instructional leadership strategy implemented by the principal runs systematically and is oriented towards tangible results. The results of the observation showed that there was open and continuous communication with teachers through weekly informal meetings that functioned as a space for sharing ideas and reflection on learning practices. In addition, the use of WhatsApp groups is used as a means of quick coordination to ensure that academic information is delivered in a timely manner, thereby accelerating problem solving and strengthening a sense of togetherness. Documentation studies revealed that school principals routinely prepare learning evaluation reports based on student learning outcomes and teacher reflections at the end of each semester. This data is the basis for planning improvement programs, such as the reading morning program which has been proven to increase the average student literacy assessment results by 8%. These findings show a clear link between instructional leadership, improving teacher performance, strengthening the value of professionalism, and the growth of a learning culture and pride in the educator profession.

School principals face various challenges in the implementation of instructional leadership, ranging from limited teacher competence in learning innovation, resistance to academic supervision, low motivation and collaboration between teachers, to limited learning facilities and parental support. Administrative burdens and adaptation demands to the Independent Curriculum also hinder the focus of teacher development. To respond to these conditions, school principals implement reflective and collaborative coaching through guiding supervision, ongoing professional training, and teacher learning community (PLC) development. In addition, teacher motivation is strengthened through an award system, parental involvement is increased through parenting programs, and local resources are optimized to support learning. This participatory, humanist, and data-driven approach has proven to be effective in building a collaborative professional work culture oriented towards improving teacher teaching performance in a sustainable manner.

Based on the description of the findings above, there are five stages of strategy implemented by the principal of SDN 2 Cianting, Purwakarta regency in building teacher teaching performance, namely:



Fig. 1. Five Steps of Principal's Instructional Leadership Strategy in Improving Teacher Performance

The following are 5 strategic steps implemented by the principal of SDN 2 Cianting, Purwakarta Regency in building and improving teacher teaching performance, formulated systematically and based on empirical findings:

1. Setting clear and contextual learning standards

The principal sets teacher performance expectations that are in line with the national curriculum and the local needs of students. These standards are described in learning targets, indicators of student activity, and assessment achievements that are monitored periodically.

2. Implement reflective and guiding academic supervision

Supervision is carried out as a process of professional assistance, not repressive supervision. Teachers are accompanied in planning, implementing, and evaluating learning through constructive feedback and reflective discussions.

3. Develop teachers' professional capacity in an ongoing manner

Principals facilitate teacher training, workshops, and learning communities (PLCs), including guidance on the implementation of innovative learning, authentic assessments, and the use of learning media.

4. Building a culture of collaboration and teacher leadership

Teachers are involved in strategic roles such as literacy coordinators, curriculum teams, and peer mentors. The practice of peer review teaching is applied to share good practices and strengthen professional responsibility.

5. Strengthen communication, motivation, and school quality culture

School principals maintain open communication through formal and informal forums, give appreciation for teachers' performance, and instill the values of professionalism, work ethics, and pride in the educator profession.

The data collected showed a significant improvement in teacher teaching performance after the implementation of instructional leadership strategies. The improvement is mainly seen in the quality of learning planning, the use of active learning methods, and the implementation of competency-based evaluations. The results of classroom observations indicate an intensification of interaction between teachers and students, accompanied by the use of more varied and creative learning strategies. This improvement in learning practices has a direct impact on student learning outcomes which tend to be more stable and show an improvement compared to the previous year. Overall, the findings of the study confirm that the instructional leadership of the principal of SDN 2 Cianting, Purwakarta Regency, is effective because it is implemented systematically and planned. School principals are able to integrate their roles as coaches, facilitators, communicators, and motivators simultaneously, creating a collaborative, professional, and quality-oriented learning environment. This leadership not only significantly improves teacher performance, but also establishes a school culture that is adaptive to the dynamics and changes in education policy.

The instructional leadership of the principal is a key factor in improving the teaching performance of teachers at the elementary school level, because it directly places the quality of learning as the core of school management. An effective principal in instructional leadership not only establishes a clear vision and mission of the school, but also actively manages the learning program as well as builds a conducive and quality-improvement-oriented learning climate. Through this role, the principal is able to influence the organizational structure of the school, shape performance expectations, and direct the secondary leadership function to be in harmony with the learning objectives ([Shaked, 2025](#)). In addition, instructional leadership is realized through systematic monitoring of teaching practices, classroom observations, and the provision of professional development relevant to teacher needs. Various empirical findings suggest that consistent instructional leadership practices are positively correlated with improved teacher teaching performance and strengthening a supportive school culture ([Yuanyuan & Alias, 2025](#)). Thus, the principal as an instructional leader not only improves the quality of teaching, but also creates a professional environment that encourages teachers to continue to develop in an ongoing manner.

The five stages of the strategy implemented by school principals in building teacher teaching performance include: 1) Setting clear and contextual learning standards; 2) Implementing reflective and guiding academic supervision; 3) Develop teachers' professional capacity on an ongoing basis; 4) Building a culture of

collaboration and teacher leadership; and 5) Strengthening communication, motivation, and school quality culture. This is in line with the seven steps to effective instructional leadership according to Elaine McEwan which emphasizes the role of the principal as a quality-oriented learning leader (McEwan, 2002). These steps include setting a clear vision, mission, and learning goals; consistent management of the curriculum and learning process; and monitoring and evaluation of teaching practices through observation and constructive feedback. In addition, school principals play a role in encouraging teacher professional development, creating a conducive and collaborative learning climate, and utilizing data on learning outcomes and teacher performance as a basis for decision-making. All of these steps are strengthened by the example of the principal as a learning leader who is directly involved in the academic process.

Instructional leadership is a strategic role that requires school principals to have managerial and pedagogical capacity in managing and improving the quality of learning in schools. Principals are responsible for developing assessment and accountability systems to monitor student learning progress, align assessments with the curriculum, and reduce academic achievement gaps (Bixler & Ceballos, 2025; Guo et al., 2025). In addition, the principal plays a role in setting clear learning goals, directing the implementation of instructional programs, and creating a conducive learning climate. Through support for teacher professional development, providing constructive feedback, and exemplary learning practices, school principals are able to strengthen teacher confidence and foster a collaborative culture oriented towards improving the quality of learning in a sustainable manner.

Today's principals are faced with the complexity of the challenge of implementing instructional leadership effectively. These challenges include the limitations of teachers' competence in developing learning innovations, the emergence of resistance to academic supervision, low work motivation, and a weak culture of collaboration between teachers. This condition is exacerbated by limited learning facilities and the lack of parental support for the education process (Ismiarti, 2023; Rahyasih et al., 2020). On the other hand, the high administrative burden and the demands for adaptation to the Independent Curriculum often divert the focus of school principals from the role of teacher academic development. Faced with this situation, school principals are required to formulate an adaptive and learning-oriented leadership strategy. A reflective and collaborative coaching approach is a strategic alternative, which is realized through guiding academic supervision, continuous professional training, and strengthening the teacher's learning community. This strategy not only improves teachers' pedagogic competence, but also encourages the formation of a sustainable professional learning culture in schools.

In response to various problems faced, school principals implement various solution strategies, including awarding outstanding teachers, increasing parental involvement through parenting programs, and optimizing local resources to support the learning process (Arifin & Hanif, 2024). This participatory and data-based approach has been proven to be able to build a collaborative professional work culture and have an impact on improving teacher teaching performance in a sustainable. Furthermore, instructional leaders are required to systematically utilize data to identify learning needs, lead school improvements, and build a solid professional team. The use of technology and artificial intelligence (AI) can also strengthen leadership effectiveness through data analysis and self-paced learning. In the context of special education, school principals are directly involved in curriculum development, teacher evaluation, and staff development. The support of technology and artificial intelligence helps strengthen leadership effectiveness, while ensuring the achievement of justice and equal learning opportunities for all students.

Instructional leadership plays a strategic role in improving teacher performance as well as student learning outcomes, as it directly affects the quality of learning practices in the classroom. Various studies show that

the leadership of school principals contributes significantly to the ability of teachers to activate students' thinking processes, provide effective learning support, and manage classes optimally (Wang et al., 2025). Effective instructional leadership is realized through the formulation of a clear school vision and mission, the management of a directed learning program, and the creation of a positive and supportive learning climate. These three aspects play a role in strengthening the quality of the curriculum and encouraging sustainable teacher professional development. Furthermore, instructional leadership is not solely the domain of the principal, but can be distributed through teacher collaboration within the framework of shared instructional leadership (Liu et al., 2022). This approach encourages independence, cooperation, and learning innovation, which is particularly relevant in developing regions. Therefore, the continuous strengthening of the training and professional development of school principals is an important prerequisite for instructional leadership practices to have an optimal impact on improving the overall quality of education. Therefore, professional development and ongoing leadership training for school principals are highly recommended so that instructional leadership practices can continue to evolve and provide optimal results.

Conclusion

The instructional leadership of the principal of SDN 2 Cianting, Purwakarta Regency, has proven to play a central role in improving teachers' teaching performance through the implementation of a planned, systematic, and quality-oriented learning strategy. The implementation of five strategic steps includes: 1) Setting clear and contextual learning standards; 2) Implementing reflective and guiding academic supervision; 3) Develop teachers' professional capacity on an ongoing basis; 4) Building a culture of collaboration and teacher leadership; and 5) Strengthening communication, motivation, and school quality culture, showing leadership that focuses on strengthening learning practices. Setting high performance expectations, developing teacher leadership, and fostering positive relationships with all school residents further strengthens the professional and collaborative culture in the school environment.

However, the process of implementing instructional leadership is inseparable from various challenges, such as the limitations of teachers' competence in developing learning innovations, resistance to academic supervision, low motivation and collaboration between teachers, and limited learning facilities and parental support. Responding to these conditions, school principals implement strategic solutions in the form of reflective and guiding academic supervision, continuous professional training, the development of Professional Learning Community (PLC), the awarding of awards for outstanding teachers, and strengthening communication with parents and the community.

This approach has proven effective in improving teacher professionalism and building a supportive work culture. The impact can be seen in a significant improvement in teacher performance, especially in learning planning, the application of active methods, and competency-based evaluation. Teachers become more confident, innovative, and student-oriented, which ultimately has a positive impact on learning outcomes and school climate. These findings confirm that instructional leadership is the key to the success of schools in realizing sustainable quality education. Therefore, strengthening instructional leadership training as well as policy and resource support from governments and educational institutions are important recommendations to support the sustainable professional development of teachers.

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