



Teachers' Perceptions of Principals' Leadership Styles in Enhancing Professional Competence

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Abstract: The leadership style of a principal has a significant influence on the achievement of educational goals, particularly in improving teachers' professional competence. This study employed a descriptive qualitative research method. Data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation. The data were then analyzed using data reduction, data display, and data verification techniques. The results of this study indicate that: (1) the principal's autocratic leadership style is characterized by limited trust given to teachers, as the principal applies a certain degree of coercion in involving teachers in training programs; (2) the principal's democratic leadership style is reflected in prioritizing coordination, encouraging criticism and suggestions from teachers, providing guidance, opportunities, and full support for teachers to develop their professional competence; and (3) the supporting factors include teachers' enthusiasm, harmonious relationships between the principal and teachers, and the principal's strong commitment. Meanwhile, the inhibiting factors consist of the principal's leadership behavior, inadequate facilities and infrastructure, and the low professional competence of some teachers.

Keywords: Leadership Style, Principal, Teacher Professional Competence.

Introduction

Education is a conscious and planned process aimed at developing students' full potential, encompassing spiritual values, personality, intelligence, moral character, and skills required for social, national, and civic life. Schools, as formal educational institutions, play a strategic role in achieving these objectives through high-quality and sustainable learning processes. In this context, teachers serve as key actors who directly determine the quality of learning processes and outcomes. Law Number 14 of 2005 emphasizes that teachers are required to possess pedagogical, personal, social, and professional competencies as fundamental prerequisites for educational professionalism. However, empirical realities indicate that teachers' competencies have not yet developed optimally, particularly professional competence related to subject mastery, scholarly development, and instructional quality.

Various reports and empirical findings indicate that low teacher competence remains a serious issue in education, including in Tanggamus Regency. Data from the Teacher Competency Test reveal that teachers' average competence scores are below national standards, which negatively affects educational outcomes. This condition reinforces previous research findings indicating that educational quality is strongly influenced by teacher professionalism and the effectiveness of principals' leadership in developing educational human resources. While previous studies have emphasized the role of principals as instructional leaders and human resource managers, most have focused on general or

normative leadership approaches without deeply examining teachers' perceptions of leadership styles in enhancing professional competence.

Based on the literature review, a research gap is evident regarding the limited number of studies that specifically examine teachers' perceptions of principals' leadership styles in improving professional competence, particularly in primary schools located in rural areas. Teachers' perceptions are crucial because they influence acceptance, participation, and the effectiveness of leadership policy implementation in schools. Moreover, geographical and social contexts in rural areas may present leadership dynamics and professional development challenges that differ from those in urban schools.

The novelty of this study lies in its comprehensive exploration of teachers' perceptions of principals' leadership styles—including delegative, consultative, participative, and instructive styles—and the identification of constraints in enhancing teachers' professional competence at SD Negeri 1 Gunungsari, Ulubelu District, Tanggamus Regency. This approach positions teachers not merely as policy implementers but as subjects who directly experience and interpret leadership practices in their daily professional context. Accordingly, this study aims to analyze teachers' perceptions of principals' leadership styles in improving professional competence and to identify strategies employed by principals to overcome emerging challenges. The findings are expected to contribute to educational leadership development and the improvement of primary education quality.

Theory

The principal's leadership style refers to patterns of behavior, attitudes, and strategies employed by school leaders in influencing, directing, and mobilizing teachers and educational staff to achieve educational objectives effectively. Leadership style not only reflects the principal's managerial capacity but also interpersonal competence in building communication, motivation, and the empowerment of human resources within the school (Neni Siti Mariam & Kun Nurachadijat, 2023). From a psychological perspective, effective leadership requires principals to understand teachers' characteristics and levels of professional maturity, so that leadership decisions and behaviors are able to optimally support teachers' professional development (Amelia et al., 2023).

In the context of educational leadership, principals' leadership styles can be perceived through several primary patterns, including delegative, consultative, participative, and instructive styles. The delegative style is characterized by granting trust and authority to teachers in accordance with their competencies and responsibilities, thereby fostering autonomy and a sense of professional accountability. The consultative style is reflected in the intensity of two-way communication between principals and teachers, in which principals actively provide guidance and consideration, although final decision-making authority remains with the leader. Meanwhile, the participative style emphasizes teachers' involvement in decision making, program planning, and school evaluation, thereby cultivating a sense of ownership and collective commitment to organizational goals. The instructive style, on the other hand, places greater emphasis on clear directions, close supervision, and the reinforcement of work standards to ensure that tasks are carried out in accordance with established regulations (Adnan et al., 2024).



Teachers' perceptions of principals' leadership styles are formed through the consistency of leadership behaviors experienced in daily practice. These perceptions encompass two main dimensions: leadership oriented toward human relations (consideration) and leadership oriented toward task structure (initiating structure). Leadership that balances both dimensions is considered capable of creating a conducive, collaborative work climate oriented toward enhancing teacher performance and professionalism (Baharuddin et al., 2023). In addition, transformational and transactional leadership approaches also influence teachers' perceptions, particularly in relation to motivation, performance rewards, as well as continuous supervision and professional guidance (Firmansyah et al., 2022).

Teachers' Professional Competence

Teachers' professional competence refers to educators' abilities and authority to master subject matter comprehensively and in depth, and to apply it responsibly in accordance with professional standards. This competence encompasses the integration of knowledge, skills, and professional attitudes acquired through education, training, and continuous professional development (Kubova-Semaka, 2020). In the context of formal education, professional competence constitutes one of the primary determinants of instructional quality and the overall quality of school graduates.

Regulation of the Minister of National Education Number 16 of 2007 stipulates that teachers' professional competence includes mastery of subject matter, the ability to connect concepts across disciplines, the application of scientific concepts in everyday life, and the utilization of information and communication technology in learning. Professional teachers function not only as transmitters of knowledge but also as facilitators, mentors, and instructional innovators who are capable of adapting to developments in science and technology (Kurnia et al., 2021).

In line with evolving educational demands, teachers' professional competence also encompasses reflective and innovative capacities in developing instructional practices. Teachers are expected to actively participate in professional development activities, engage in self-evaluation, and take part in professional learning communities. Supportive and collaborative work environments, constructive academic supervision systems, and recognition of teacher performance have been shown to contribute positively to the continuous enhancement of professional competence (Seprudin, 2024).

The Relationship between Principals' Leadership Styles and Teachers' Professional Competence

Theoretically, principals' leadership styles are closely related to the enhancement of teachers' professional competence. Principals, as instructional leaders, play a crucial role in creating a school climate that supports teachers' professional development through academic supervision, facilitation of training, and the provision of fair motivation and rewards. Leadership styles that are adaptive and responsive to teachers' needs can encourage teachers to improve instructional quality and develop their professional competence optimally (Utami et al., 2024).



Accordingly, teachers' perceptions of principals' leadership styles constitute an important aspect in understanding the effectiveness of educational leadership. Leadership that is able to proportionally integrate delegative, consultative, participative, and instructive approaches is considered more effective in enhancing teachers' professional competence and improving educational quality in a sustainable manner.

Method

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach aimed at obtaining an in-depth understanding of the implementation of creative learning management in improving educational quality at the elementary school level. This approach was selected because it allows researchers to comprehensively explore phenomena occurring in the field through observation of behaviors, activities, and interactions of research subjects in their natural context. The research was conducted at SD Negeri 1 Gunungsari, Ulubelu District, Tanggamus Regency, Lampung Province, based on the consideration that the school actively develops creative learning and demonstrates strong commitment to improving educational quality. The data sources consisted of the principal as the key informant and teachers as the primary informants directly involved in the learning process. From a total of 25 teachers, five were selected as research informants using the snowball sampling technique, enabling the gradual collection of data until information saturation was achieved. This technique is considered appropriate in qualitative research because it produces in-depth and relevant data aligned with the research focus.

Data collection was conducted through interviews and observations. Semi-structured interviews were used to explore informants' views, experiences, and perceptions regarding the implementation of principal leadership styles and creative learning management. Observations were conducted by directly examining school documents and activities related to leadership policies, learning programs, and the school's vision and mission. The use of these two techniques aimed to ensure data complementarity and strengthen research findings. Data validity was ensured through triangulation techniques involving source triangulation, technique triangulation, and time triangulation. Source triangulation compared information obtained from principals and teachers, technique triangulation matched interview data with observation data, and time triangulation involved data collection at different times to ensure information consistency. Verified data were subsequently analyzed descriptively and qualitatively.

Data analysis was conducted through three main stages: data reduction, data classification, and conclusion drawing. Data reduction involved selecting and focusing on data relevant to the research objectives. The data were then classified into themes aligned with the research focus to facilitate interpretation. The final stage involved drawing conclusions through repeated verification, resulting in a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of creative learning management practices in the school.

Result and Discussion



The findings of this study indicate that the principal of SD Negeri 1 Gunungsari implements a delegative leadership style as one of the strategies to enhance teachers' professional competence. The application of this style is manifested through the selective delegation of authority and responsibilities to teachers, adjusted to their respective abilities, experiences, and professional roles. The principal does not merely assign tasks but also provides clear guidance through direct communication and official assignment letters, while continuously monitoring task implementation through reports and evaluation meetings. These findings demonstrate that teachers are positioned as professional subjects with the capacity to assume responsibility and develop their potential. This practice is consistent with Hersey and Blanchard's situational leadership theory, which emphasizes that effective delegation is appropriate when subordinates possess adequate levels of competence and work maturity.

The results of this study are also in line with Lestari (2024), who found that delegation accompanied by mentoring and evaluation can enhance teachers' motivation, performance, and professional competence. Similarly, Fu (2024) reinforces this finding by asserting that the delegation of authority accompanied by monitoring and feedback fosters teachers' autonomy and professional responsibility. In addition to the delegative style, the principal also applies a participative leadership style to improve teachers' professional competence. This style is reflected in teachers' active involvement in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of school programs. Teachers are provided opportunities to express ideas, suggestions, and needs through meetings and collaborative discussions, resulting in school programs that are collectively designed and contextually relevant. The application of a participative leadership style creates a democratic work climate, strengthens teamwork, and fosters a sense of ownership of school programs. Theoretically, participative leadership emphasizes the importance of subordinate involvement in decision making to enhance professional commitment and responsibility. The findings of this study are consistent with Septiani (2025), who reported that democratic-participative leadership has a positive influence on teachers' competence and performance. Through broader involvement, teachers are encouraged to continuously improve the quality of instructional planning and implementation.

The consultative leadership style is also employed by the principal as an effort to enhance teachers' professional competence. This is demonstrated by the principal's openness to receiving teachers' input and opinions prior to making decisions. The consultation process is conducted through both formal forums, such as school meetings, and informal communication within a familial atmosphere. This approach fosters harmonious working relationships and enhances teachers' sense of being valued. The findings indicate that the principal does not adopt an authoritarian stance but rather prioritizes dialogue and shared consideration in determining school policies. These results align with the findings of Wawan Kurniawan et al. (2025), who assert that consultative leadership can enhance teachers' motivation and self-confidence. Through intensive two-way communication, teachers are more motivated to develop their professional competence, particularly in addressing instructional challenges in elementary schools located in rural areas.

Furthermore, the principal also applies an instructive leadership style to ensure that teachers' task implementation aligns with established standards. This style is manifested through the provision of clear, detailed, and structured directions regarding instructional



implementation, administrative preparation, and the achievement of performance targets. Supervision is conducted continuously through classroom supervision, administrative checks, and direct monitoring. Reprimands and corrective feedback are delivered persuasively and humanely, thereby minimizing psychological pressure on teachers. These findings are consistent with Hersey and Blanchard's situational leadership theory, which states that an instructive leadership style is necessary when leaders seek to ensure clarity of direction and work standards. This study is supported by the findings of Langga Budi Prasetya et al. (2023), who reported that instructive leadership accompanied by effective communication and a humanistic approach can improve discipline, understanding of instructional standards, and teachers' professional competence.

Although the implementation of these various leadership styles has produced positive impacts, this study also identified several constraints in efforts to enhance teachers' professional competence, including limited facilities and infrastructure, high teacher workloads, differences in teachers' abilities and readiness, and the school's geographical location in a rural area. To address these challenges, the principal adopts an adaptive leadership strategy by integrating delegative, participative, consultative, and instructive leadership styles according to situational demands. These efforts include increasing the intensity of communication, utilizing available learning resources within the surrounding environment, managing teacher workloads more proportionally, and providing continuous coaching and mentoring. This strategy is consistent with the findings of Gaikhorst et al. (2019), who emphasize the importance of principals' roles in creating structural and cultural support for teachers' professional development.

Conclusion

Based on the research findings and discussion, it can be concluded that the principal of SD Negeri 1 Gunungsari applies contextual and complementary leadership styles in improving teacher professional competence. Delegative, participative, consultative, and instructive leadership styles are flexibly implemented according to school conditions, teacher characteristics, and instructional management needs. Delegative leadership fosters teacher independence, responsibility, and confidence through proportional authority delegation. Participative leadership enhances teacher involvement in planning, implementation, and evaluation, creating a democratic and collaborative work climate. Consultative leadership increases teacher motivation and appreciation through two-way communication and openness in decision-making. Instructive leadership provides clarity of direction, work standards, and supervision that help teachers work more systematically and disciplined. Nevertheless, teacher professional competence improvement continues to face constraints such as limited infrastructure, workload, individual differences, and restricted access to professional development due to geographic factors. These findings indicate that leadership effectiveness must be supported by adequate structural and environmental conditions.

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