

EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP IN SUPPORTING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE INDEPENDENT CURRICULUM: A QUALITATIVE STUDY AT SDN 01 KARANGPUCUNG

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how educational leadership supports the implementation of the Independent Curriculum at SDN 01 Karangpucung, Indonesia. A descriptive qualitative approach was employed using semi-structured interviews, observations, and document analysis. The principal served as the primary informant, while six teachers provided supporting perspectives. Data were analyzed through data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing, with triangulation used to enhance credibility. The findings indicate that the principal integrates managerial, instructional, transformational, and supervisory leadership to facilitate curriculum implementation. Competency-based teacher workload allocation, continuous instructional guidance, collaborative professional practices, and systematic curriculum evaluation contribute to improving teaching quality and curriculum implementation. However, challenges remain, particularly students' varying literacy abilities and inconsistent parental involvement. The study concludes that an integrated leadership approach is essential for effective curriculum implementation and sustainable school improvement. These findings provide practical insights for school leaders in strengthening curriculum reform through adaptive leadership and collaborative educational practices.

Keywords: Educational Leadership, Independent Curriculum, Instructional Leadership, Elementary School

KEPEMIMPINAN PENDIDIKAN DALAM Mendukung IMPLEMENTASI KURIKULUM MERDEKA: STUDI KUALITATIF DI SDN 01 KARANGPUCUNG

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji bagaimana kepemimpinan pendidikan mendukung implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka di SDN 01 Karangpucung, Indonesia. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif melalui wawancara semi-terstruktur, observasi, dan analisis dokumen. Kepala sekolah berperan sebagai informan utama, sedangkan enam orang guru menjadi informan pendukung untuk memberikan perspektif mengenai praktik kepemimpinan dan implementasi kurikulum. Data dianalisis melalui tahapan reduksi data, penyajian data, dan penarikan kesimpulan, sedangkan triangulasi digunakan untuk meningkatkan kredibilitas temuan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kepala sekolah mengintegrasikan kepemimpinan manajerial, instruksional, transformasional, dan supervisi dalam mendukung implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka. Pembagian tugas guru berbasis kompetensi, pendampingan pembelajaran secara berkelanjutan, praktik kolaboratif antarguru, serta evaluasi kurikulum yang sistematis berkontribusi terhadap peningkatan kualitas pembelajaran. Namun demikian, kemampuan literasi siswa yang beragam dan keterlibatan orang tua yang belum konsisten masih menjadi tantangan dalam implementasi kurikulum. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa kepemimpinan yang terintegrasi merupakan faktor penting dalam mendukung implementasi kurikulum secara efektif dan peningkatan mutu sekolah secara berkelanjutan.

Kata kunci: Kepemimpinan Pendidikan, Kurikulum Merdeka, Kepemimpinan Instruksional, Sekolah Dasar

INTRODUCTION

Educational leadership plays a pivotal role in determining the quality and development of schools, particularly at the elementary school level. As the leader of the school, the principal is responsible not only for administrative management but also for guiding the teaching and learning process, fostering teachers' professional development, and creating a positive learning environment that supports educational goals. Effective leadership enables principals to coordinate school resources efficiently, ensuring that all educational components function in a coherent and productive manner.

The role of school principals has become increasingly significant as education systems continue to evolve in response to curriculum reforms and rising expectations for educational quality. In Indonesia, the implementation of the Independent Curriculum (*Kurikulum Merdeka*) has introduced new responsibilities for principals, requiring them to translate national education policies into effective school-level practices. This demands strong communication, collaborative decision-making, continuous supervision, and systematic evaluation of educational programs. Previous research has demonstrated that effective principal leadership contributes significantly to improving teacher performance by fostering supportive working environments, effective communication, and well-organized school management (Sariakin et al., 2025). Improved teacher performance ultimately leads to better educational quality and student learning outcomes.

Beyond administrative responsibilities, principals also play a strategic role in curriculum planning and implementation. Ralebese et al. (2025) emphasize that principal leadership is essential in planning, implementing, and monitoring educational programs, thereby ensuring the successful execution of curriculum reforms in elementary schools. Consequently, effective leadership extends beyond organizational management to facilitating teachers' ability to adapt to educational changes.

These theoretical perspectives are reflected in the practices observed at SDN 01

Karangpucung. Based on observations and interviews with the school principal, Mr. Surip Supriyanto, S.Pd., the process of assigning teaching responsibilities begins with a comprehensive evaluation of the previous academic year. Teachers' competencies, experiences, and instructional performance are carefully assessed before teaching assignments are officially determined through the School Teaching Assignment Decree (*Surat Keputusan Pembagian Belajar Mengajar*). This systematic approach illustrates how human resource management is integrated into educational leadership to optimize teacher placement and instructional effectiveness.

Despite these structured leadership practices, implementing the Independent Curriculum presents several challenges from the teachers' perspective. Teachers reported that the current curriculum requires students, particularly those in the lower grades, to master learning materials that exceed their existing literacy and reasoning abilities. As many students are still developing foundational reading and comprehension skills, teachers must invest additional effort in adapting instructional strategies to meet students' learning needs.

To address these challenges, teachers at SDN 01 Karangpucung actively collaborate in developing instructional materials, including Teaching Modules (*Modul Ajar*) and Lesson Plans (*Rencana Pelaksanaan Pembelajaran*). Such collaborative practices enable teachers to exchange ideas, maintain consistency in curriculum implementation, and reduce the administrative burden associated with preparing instructional documents independently. This finding is consistent with Supriadin and Nurbaiti (2025), who reported that teacher collaboration in developing Independent Curriculum learning materials improves shared understanding, minimizes instructional difficulties, and enhances overall teaching effectiveness.

In addition to internal collaboration, parental involvement represents another critical factor influencing curriculum implementation. Observations revealed that teachers frequently encounter difficulties when students complete independent projects and activities under the

Projek Penguatan Profil Pelajar Pancasila (P5) program, primarily due to limited parental participation. Since the Independent Curriculum emphasizes experiential and project-based learning, effective collaboration between schools and families becomes essential. To strengthen this partnership, SDN 01 Karangpucung regularly conducts orientation and socialization programs at the beginning of each academic year to communicate the school's vision, educational objectives, and parents' roles in supporting students' learning both at school and at home.

Based on these conditions, this study aims to examine the implementation of educational leadership at SDN 01 Karangpucung. Specifically, it explores how the school principal exercises leadership in aligning the school's vision, supporting teachers in overcoming instructional challenges, and fostering collaboration between the school and parents to enhance the teaching and learning process. The findings are expected to provide practical insights into adaptive educational leadership in the context of elementary education and curriculum reform.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Educational Leadership

Educational leadership refers to the process by which school leaders influence, guide, and coordinate educational activities to achieve institutional goals and improve the quality of teaching and learning (Pegib, 2012). It encompasses managerial, instructional, transformational, and supervisory functions that enable principals to develop teachers' professional capacity, foster collaboration, manage school resources effectively, and create a positive learning environment. In this study, educational leadership serves as the overarching framework for examining how the principal supports the successful implementation of the Independent Curriculum.

Independent Curriculum

The Independent Curriculum (*Kurikulum Merdeka*) is Indonesia's current national curriculum framework designed to provide greater flexibility in teaching and learning while emphasizing competency-based education, differentiated instruction, project-

based learning, and the development of students' character through the *Projek Penguatan Profil Pelajar Pancasila (P5)*. Successful implementation of this curriculum requires not only teacher readiness but also effective school leadership, collaborative practices, and continuous curriculum evaluation to accommodate students' diverse learning needs.

Instructional Leadership

Instructional leadership is a leadership approach that prioritizes improving the quality of teaching and student learning by focusing on curriculum implementation, teacher professional development, classroom supervision, and instructional support (Kilg & Sasan, 2023). Unlike administrative leadership, instructional leadership directly influences pedagogical practices by providing continuous guidance, monitoring instructional effectiveness, and facilitating teachers' adaptation to curriculum reforms. In this study, instructional leadership is reflected in the principal's ongoing mentoring and support for teachers during the implementation of the Independent Curriculum.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach to examine the role of the school principal in managing and implementing the Independent Curriculum at SDN 01 Karangpucung. A qualitative design was selected because the study aimed to gain an in-depth understanding of leadership practices, decision-making processes, and strategies adopted by the principal to support curriculum implementation and improve instructional quality within the school.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, direct classroom and school observations, and document analysis. The primary informant was the principal of SDN 01 Karangpucung, Mr. Surip Supriyanto, S.Pd., while six teachers participated as supporting informants to provide complementary perspectives regarding leadership practices and curriculum implementation. The interviews explored several aspects of educational leadership, including teacher workload allocation,

curriculum implementation strategies, collaborative decision-making, administrative management, curriculum evaluation, and school–parent partnerships. Documentary evidence included the School Teaching Assignment Decree (*Surat Keputusan Pembagian Belajar Mengajar*), Teaching Modules, Learning Outcomes (*Capaian Pembelajaran*), Learning Objective Flow (*Alur Tujuan Pembelajaran*), and teachers' instructional journals.

The collected data were analyzed using the interactive model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Data triangulation was conducted by comparing findings obtained from interviews, observations, and documentary evidence to enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the study. Through this analytical process, the study provides a comprehensive understanding of how the school principal coordinates teachers, facilitates the implementation of the Independent Curriculum, and strengthens collaboration between the school and parents to improve educational quality at SDN 01 Karangpucung.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Principal Leadership in Teacher Workload Allocation

The findings indicate that teacher workload allocation at SDN 01 Karangpucung is systematically organized according to teachers' competencies, teaching experience, and professional capabilities. Interviews with six teachers revealed that both instructional responsibilities and additional assignments were distributed fairly, allowing teachers to perform their duties without experiencing excessive workloads. This perception was supported by classroom observations, which showed that teachers clearly understood their respective responsibilities and carried out instructional activities effectively.

Document analysis further confirmed the existence of an official School Teaching Assignment Decree (*Surat Keputusan Pembagian Belajar Mengajar*), demonstrating that teacher assignments were formally planned and implemented through structured human

resource management. Teachers also reported that instructional activities remained their primary responsibility, while administrative tasks were managed without interfering with classroom teaching.

These findings suggest that the principal applies effective human resource management practices by aligning teacher assignments with individual competencies. Such practices are consistent with the argument of Sariakin et al. (2025), who emphasized that strategic leadership in workload distribution contributes to teacher effectiveness and organizational performance by creating supportive working conditions and improving instructional quality.

Principal Leadership in the Implementation of the Independent Curriculum

The implementation of the Independent Curriculum at SDN 01 Karangpucung is strongly supported by the principal's instructional leadership. Teachers reported receiving continuous guidance regarding curriculum implementation and instructional planning aligned with the principles of the Independent Curriculum. Nevertheless, they acknowledged several challenges, particularly the relatively high level of learning materials for lower-grade students whose literacy and reasoning skills are still developing.

Classroom observations showed that teachers continuously adjusted their instructional strategies to accommodate students' diverse learning abilities. Individual assistance, differentiated instruction, and active learning approaches were frequently employed to help students understand the learning materials more effectively.

Document analysis revealed that teachers had prepared Teaching Modules, Learning Outcomes (*Capaian Pembelajaran*), and Learning Objective Flow (*Alur Tujuan Pembelajaran*) in accordance with curriculum requirements. These instructional documents were developed through continuous coordination with the principal, who also provided guidance for addressing the needs of students with diverse learning characteristics, including those requiring additional educational support.

The findings demonstrate that instructional leadership extends beyond administrative supervision to providing pedagogical support that enables teachers to successfully implement curriculum reforms. This result supports Ralebese et al. (2025), who concluded that effective school leadership plays a critical role in ensuring successful curriculum implementation through continuous planning, supervision, and professional guidance.

Principal Leadership in Building Shared Vision and Teacher Collaboration

The study found that the principal actively promotes collaboration among teachers to establish a shared vision regarding curriculum implementation. Teachers reported that Teaching Modules and other instructional materials were developed collaboratively through regular discussions and professional exchanges.

Observations confirmed that teachers maintained effective communication and worked collectively rather than individually in designing instructional materials and addressing classroom challenges. Documentary evidence also demonstrated consistency in the format and structure of instructional documents across teachers, indicating coordinated planning and shared professional standards.

These collaborative practices create opportunities for teachers to exchange experiences, solve instructional problems collectively, and maintain consistency in curriculum implementation. The findings are consistent with Supriadin & Nurbaiti (2025), who argued that teacher collaboration enhances curriculum implementation by improving shared understanding, reducing instructional barriers, and strengthening professional learning communities.

Principal Leadership in Managing Instructional Administration

Teachers perceived instructional administration as an essential component of their professional responsibilities but emphasized that administrative requirements should not reduce the quality of classroom instruction. They reported that administrative tasks become more manageable when

responsibilities are clearly organized and collaboratively implemented.

Observational findings showed that all teachers possessed the required instructional documents, including Teaching Modules, Learning Objective Flow, Learning Outcomes, and teaching journals. Documentary analysis further confirmed that these administrative documents were complete and consistently utilized as instructional guidelines.

The findings indicate that the principal successfully balances administrative accountability with instructional priorities by ensuring that documentation supports rather than hinders classroom teaching. This leadership approach enables teachers to devote greater attention to improving student learning while maintaining compliance with educational regulations.

Principal Leadership in Curriculum Evaluation and School–Parent Partnership

Continuous curriculum evaluation emerged as an important component of educational leadership at SDN 01 Karangpucung. Teachers reported that regular evaluations enabled the school to identify instructional challenges and develop appropriate solutions for improving teaching effectiveness. One of the most frequently reported challenges involved students' difficulties in understanding learning materials, requiring teachers to modify instructional strategies according to students' learning needs.

Beyond internal school factors, teachers consistently identified parental involvement as a critical determinant of successful curriculum implementation. Limited parental participation in supporting students' learning at home, particularly during project-based learning activities under the *Projek Penguatan Profil Pelajar Pancasila* (P5), remains one of the major challenges faced by the school.

The principal actively encourages communication between the school and parents through regular meetings and school orientation programs. Observations indicated that these initiatives strengthen parents' understanding of the school's educational vision and their role in supporting students' learning both at school and at home.

Overall, the findings suggest that effective educational leadership extends beyond internal school management by fostering productive partnerships with families. Such collaboration creates a supportive learning ecosystem that contributes to the successful implementation of the Independent Curriculum while promoting continuous improvement in teaching quality and student learning outcomes.

Principal Leadership in Teacher Workload Allocation

The findings indicate that the principal effectively performs the managerial function of educational leadership by allocating teaching responsibilities based on teachers' competencies, professional experience, and instructional expertise. This competency-based approach demonstrates that teacher assignment is not merely an administrative activity but a strategic process of human resource management designed to optimize instructional effectiveness. By aligning teaching responsibilities with individual capabilities, the principal creates conditions that enable teachers to carry out their professional duties more efficiently while maintaining a balanced workload.

This finding supports the managerial leadership perspective proposed by Susanto & Kumar (2022), who argue that principals are responsible for optimizing school resources to achieve educational objectives. Similarly, Buchori et al. (2018) emphasize that clear task distribution and effective coordination among school personnel are fundamental to organizational effectiveness. The present findings also corroborate those of Hadijah (2024), who reported that structured workload allocation, clear instructional direction, and continuous leadership support positively influence teacher performance. Likewise, Hakim et al. (2026) found that effective principal leadership and active stakeholder involvement contribute significantly to the successful implementation of the Independent Curriculum.

An important contribution of this study is the finding that competency-based workload allocation enhances teachers' professional responsibility and motivation. Teachers

perceived that assignments matched their professional strengths, enabling them to concentrate more effectively on instructional activities while fulfilling administrative responsibilities without excessive burden. This observation extends previous studies by demonstrating that strategic workload allocation not only improves organizational efficiency but also strengthens teachers' commitment to implementing curriculum reforms.

These findings are further supported by Kadariah (2020), who argues that effective human resource management, clear role distribution, and systematic coordination are essential characteristics of high-quality schools. Within the context of SDN 01 Karangpucung, these managerial practices appear to create a supportive working environment that facilitates teacher collaboration and instructional effectiveness, both of which are essential for implementing the Independent Curriculum successfully.

Despite these positive findings, the study also suggests that competency-based workload allocation alone is insufficient to ensure sustained instructional quality. Its long-term effectiveness depends on continuous monitoring and periodic evaluation conducted by the principal. Without consistent supervision, even well-designed workload distribution may gradually lose its effectiveness as teachers' professional responsibilities and school needs evolve. Therefore, managerial leadership should be integrated with supervisory leadership to maintain balanced workload distribution and continuous improvement in teaching quality.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that effective teacher workload allocation represents an essential foundation of educational leadership. By combining strategic planning with ongoing supervision, principals can strengthen teacher professionalism, improve instructional effectiveness, and create organizational conditions that support sustainable educational improvement.

Principal Leadership in the Implementation of the Independent Curriculum

The findings reveal that the principal plays a central role in facilitating the implementation of the Independent Curriculum by providing continuous guidance, instructional support, and professional mentoring for teachers. This leadership practice reflects the characteristics of instructional leadership, in which the principal actively focuses on improving teaching quality rather than merely performing administrative responsibilities. Through regular supervision and pedagogical guidance, the principal assists teachers in adapting instructional strategies to curriculum requirements and students' learning needs.

These findings are consistent with Purba & Idawati (2025), who describe instructional leadership as a leadership approach that prioritizes teacher development, curriculum implementation, and student learning outcomes. Similarly, Santosa & Zuhaery (2021) found that principals contribute significantly to teachers' professionalism through continuous coaching and professional development during curriculum reform. The present findings also support Naitupulu (2024), who reported that successful implementation of the Independent Curriculum depends largely on principals' ability to promote teacher collaboration, literacy development, and differentiated instruction. Furthermore, Isa et al. (2022) demonstrated that instructional leadership enables schools to overcome curriculum implementation challenges through systematic teacher mentoring and continuous evaluation.

A notable contribution of this study is the identification of instructional leadership as a mechanism that enables teachers to respond to students' diverse learning characteristics. Teachers acknowledged that principal support encouraged them to modify instructional approaches, provide individualized assistance, and adopt differentiated learning strategies for students with varying academic abilities. These practices indicate that instructional leadership extends beyond curriculum administration by directly influencing classroom practices and teachers' pedagogical decision-making.

Nevertheless, the findings also reveal that successful curriculum implementation remains constrained by students' varying literacy and reasoning abilities. Many teachers

reported that lower-grade students continue to experience difficulties in comprehending learning materials, requiring additional instructional adaptation. This finding suggests that curriculum reform cannot be achieved solely through effective school leadership or teacher preparedness. Instead, successful implementation requires students' academic readiness, supportive learning environments, and continuous efforts to strengthen foundational literacy skills.

These findings are consistent with Amanda et al. (2023), who concluded that the success of the Independent Curriculum depends not only on principal leadership and teacher readiness but also on schools' capacity to adapt learning activities to students' characteristics. In the context of SDN 01 Karangpucung, principal leadership serves as a facilitating factor that supports curriculum implementation, while student literacy remains one of the primary challenges affecting learning effectiveness.

The findings therefore imply that future school improvement initiatives should place greater emphasis on strengthening literacy culture alongside curriculum implementation. The principal should continue developing school-wide literacy programs, professional learning opportunities for teachers, and instructional innovations that address students' diverse learning needs. Such integrated efforts would ensure that the implementation of the Independent Curriculum extends beyond administrative compliance and contributes meaningfully to improving students' learning outcomes and overall educational quality.

Principal Leadership in Building a Shared Vision and Teacher Collaboration

The findings demonstrate that the principal plays a transformative leadership role by fostering a collaborative culture among teachers in developing instructional materials and implementing the Independent Curriculum. Rather than working individually, teachers regularly engage in collaborative discussions to prepare Teaching Modules, Learning Outcomes, and Learning Objective Flows, thereby establishing a shared understanding of curriculum implementation. This collaborative practice promotes instructional consistency while encouraging teachers to exchange

professional experiences and solve pedagogical challenges collectively.

These findings are consistent with transformational leadership theory, which emphasizes the leader's ability to create a shared vision, strengthen organizational commitment, and encourage collaboration among organizational members (Nguyen et al., 2023). Similarly, the educational leadership perspective proposed by Afkarina & Puspita W (2023) argues that effective school leadership should cultivate a collaborative organizational culture that continuously supports instructional improvement. The present findings further support those of Kusrinisari et al. (2025), who reported that collaborative principal leadership enhances teachers' readiness to implement the Independent Curriculum through intensive communication and professional cooperation. Likewise, Agusnani et al. (2025) found that transformational principals empower teachers to participate actively in school development, while Tunggal et al. (2025) emphasized that principal-teacher collaboration is fundamental to successful contextual curriculum management.

An important contribution of this study is the finding that teacher collaboration functions not only as a mechanism for coordinating instructional planning but also as a form of continuous professional learning. Through collaborative discussions, teachers are able to share teaching experiences, develop innovative instructional strategies, and address classroom challenges collectively. Consequently, collaboration contributes to strengthening teachers' pedagogical competence while maintaining consistency in curriculum implementation.

Despite these positive outcomes, the study also reveals that teacher collaboration remains largely informal and lacks a structured mechanism for evaluating its effectiveness. Without systematic reflection, collaborative activities may become administrative routines rather than meaningful opportunities for professional growth. Therefore, the principal should establish formal professional learning communities or reflective discussion forums that encourage continuous evaluation, knowledge sharing, and evidence-based

instructional improvement. Such initiatives would further strengthen teachers' professional capacity and support the long-term sustainability of curriculum implementation.

Principal Leadership in Managing Instructional Administration

The findings indicate that the principal effectively balances administrative accountability with instructional priorities by ensuring that administrative requirements support rather than hinder classroom teaching. Teachers reported that instructional administration is recognized as an essential professional responsibility; however, administrative tasks are organized in ways that allow teachers to maintain their primary focus on student learning. This leadership approach reflects an understanding that educational administration should facilitate instructional effectiveness instead of creating unnecessary bureaucratic burdens.

These findings are consistent with Oladimeji et al. (2024), who argue that principals, as educational administrators, are responsible for developing efficient administrative systems that support school effectiveness. At SDN 01 Karangpucung, the availability of Teaching Modules, Learning Outcomes, Learning Objective Flows, and teaching journals demonstrates that instructional documentation has been systematically prepared to support curriculum implementation. Moreover, the principal performs a supervisory role by ensuring that these documents are aligned with classroom practices rather than serving merely as formal administrative requirements.

The present findings also support previous studies emphasizing the importance of academic supervision in improving instructional quality. Prabahaar & Jerome (2023) concluded that effective school leadership requires balancing administrative responsibilities with teaching improvement, while Saputra et al. (2025) identified systematic instructional administration as an important factor supporting the successful implementation of the Independent Curriculum. These studies reinforce the argument that administrative management contributes to educational quality

when it is integrated with instructional supervision.

An important implication of this study is that the effectiveness of instructional administration should not be measured solely by the completeness of documents but by the extent to which these documents guide instructional planning, classroom implementation, and learning evaluation. Although administrative documentation at SDN 01 Karangpucung is well organized, future efforts should focus on strengthening its use as a reflective tool for continuous instructional improvement. This approach would enable administrative practices to function as instruments of professional learning rather than merely fulfilling regulatory requirements.

Principal Leadership in Curriculum Evaluation and School–Parent Partnership

The findings reveal that the principal performs an important supervisory role by conducting continuous evaluations of curriculum implementation and identifying instructional challenges experienced by teachers. These evaluations provide valuable information for improving teaching practices and ensuring that the objectives of the Independent Curriculum are achieved. Rather than functioning solely as a monitoring activity, curriculum evaluation serves as a continuous improvement process that supports teachers in responding to students' learning needs.

These findings are consistent with Sukmara et al. (2023), who argue that supervision and evaluation constitute essential responsibilities of educational leaders in maintaining instructional quality. The present study further demonstrates that effective curriculum evaluation extends beyond internal school management by incorporating feedback from teachers regarding classroom challenges and instructional effectiveness. Such an approach enables school leaders to make informed decisions that support continuous curriculum improvement.

Another significant finding concerns the importance of school–parent partnerships in supporting curriculum implementation. Teachers consistently reported that parental involvement plays a crucial role in reinforcing students' learning at home, particularly during

project-based learning activities under the Independent Curriculum. These findings support Lv et al. (2025), who found that strong partnerships between schools and families improve students' academic achievement by strengthening learning support, increasing student motivation, and enhancing communication between schools and parents. Likewise, Sudjiati & Muhdi (2024) emphasized that successful curriculum implementation requires continuous leadership throughout planning, implementation, and evaluation, while Kurniati et al. (2023) highlighted the contribution of parents and other school stakeholders to the successful implementation of the Independent Curriculum.

A major contribution of this study is the finding that effective educational leadership encompasses not only managerial, instructional, transformational, and supervisory functions within the school but also the ability to establish productive partnerships with families. Nevertheless, parental participation remains inconsistent, representing one of the primary challenges affecting students' learning outcomes. This finding suggests that improving educational quality depends not only on internal school leadership but also on strengthening external collaboration with families and the wider community.

Therefore, principals should develop more systematic communication strategies, including regular parent meetings, parenting education programs, and greater parental participation in school activities. Strengthening these partnerships would create a more supportive educational ecosystem in which schools and families share responsibility for students' academic and personal development. Such collaborative efforts are expected to enhance the effectiveness of the Independent Curriculum while contributing to sustainable improvements in educational quality.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that principal leadership plays a pivotal role in supporting the successful implementation of the Independent Curriculum at SDN 01 Karangpucung through the integration of managerial, instructional, transformational, and supervisory leadership practices. Effective leadership is reflected in

competency-based teacher workload allocation, continuous instructional guidance, collaborative school culture, balanced administrative management, and ongoing curriculum evaluation. Together, these leadership dimensions create an organizational environment that enables teachers to implement curriculum reforms more effectively while maintaining the quality of teaching and learning.

Among these leadership dimensions, instructional and transformational leadership emerged as particularly important in facilitating teacher adaptation to curriculum changes. Continuous mentoring from the principal encouraged teachers to develop more responsive instructional strategies, whereas collaborative planning strengthened professional learning and promoted consistency in curriculum implementation. Nevertheless, the study also identified several challenges, particularly students' varying literacy and reasoning abilities and inconsistent parental involvement, which continue to influence the effectiveness of curriculum implementation.

This study contributes to the educational leadership literature by demonstrating that successful curriculum reform requires an integrated leadership approach that combines organizational management, instructional support, teacher empowerment, and stakeholder engagement. Rather than functioning independently, these leadership dimensions complement one another in creating a sustainable learning environment that supports continuous school improvement.

Based on these findings, schools should strengthen literacy development programs, establish formal professional learning communities to sustain teacher collaboration, and develop more systematic communication strategies with parents to reinforce school–family partnerships. Future studies are encouraged to examine the implementation of integrated leadership practices across different educational settings using broader participant groups and mixed-method approaches to enhance the generalizability of the findings.

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