

Principal Instructional Leadership and the Reflective Culture of Elementary School Teachers in Batam

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzed the instructional leadership of school principals in strengthening teachers' reflective culture in public elementary schools in Sagulung District, Batam City. The study used a qualitative phenomenological approach. Data were collected through interviews, observations, and documentation involving principals and teachers selected purposively. The data were analyzed through condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing with verification. Credibility was strengthened through source and technique triangulation. The findings show that principals strengthened learning quality by formulating a data-based learning vision, conducting academic supervision, providing feedback, and building collaborative forums. However, teachers' reflection had not yet become a systematic school culture. The main constraints were uneven awareness of reflective practice, limited time due to teaching and administrative workloads, and the absence of structured instruments for documenting and following up reflection. The study concludes that instructional leadership becomes more effective when supervision is linked with collegial reflection, teacher learning communities, and measurable follow-up plans.

ABSTRACT

Penelitian ini menganalisis kepemimpinan pembelajaran kepala sekolah dalam menguatkan budaya refleksi guru di Sekolah Dasar Negeri Kecamatan Sagulung, Kota Batam. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif jenis fenomenologi. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara, observasi, dan dokumentasi terhadap kepala sekolah dan guru yang dipilih secara purposif. Analisis data dilakukan melalui kondensasi data, penyajian data, serta penarikan dan verifikasi kesimpulan. Keabsahan data diperkuat melalui triangulasi sumber dan teknik. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kepala sekolah menguatkan mutu pembelajaran melalui perumusan visi berbasis data, supervisi akademik, pemberian umpan balik, dan pengembangan forum kolaboratif. Namun, refleksi guru belum sepenuhnya menjadi budaya sekolah yang sistematis. Kendala utama meliputi kesadaran guru yang belum merata, keterbatasan waktu karena beban mengajar dan administrasi, serta belum adanya instrumen terstruktur untuk mendokumentasikan dan menindaklanjuti refleksi. Penelitian menyimpulkan bahwa kepemimpinan pembelajaran lebih efektif apabila supervisi dikaitkan dengan refleksi kolegal, komunitas belajar guru, dan rencana tindak lanjut yang terukur

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1. Introduction

Improving the quality of learning in elementary schools is an important agenda in educational development because, at this level, the foundations of students' knowledge, attitudes, skills, and learning habits begin to be formed. The quality of learning is not determined solely by the curriculum, facilities, or completeness of school administration. It also depends strongly on teachers' ability to examine their teaching experiences, evaluate the strategies they use, and continuously improve instruction. In this context, a teacher reflective culture becomes a fundamental need so that learning does not proceed merely as a routine, but develops as a professional practice that is adaptive, meaningful, and oriented toward students' needs.

National policy also positions reflection as part of teacher and principal performance management. Regulation of the Director General of Teachers and Education Personnel Number 7607/B.B1/HK.03/2023 emphasizes student-centered learning, performance dialogue, continuous feedback, performance development, and the establishment of a reflective culture among members of educational units [1]. Thus, reflection is not only an individual teacher activity, but also part of a school quality-improvement system that must be led, facilitated, and followed up in a planned manner.

Theoretically, this study is grounded in the concept of instructional leadership. [2] explain that instructional leadership places principals in three main functions: defining the school mission, managing the instructional program, and creating a positive learning climate. Principals do not merely carry out administrative functions; they also guide learning through academic supervision, monitoring of the learning process, curriculum coordination, feedback, and teachers' professional development. These functions become relevant when schools face issues of learning quality and when teachers' reflective habits are not yet strong.

This study is also supported by Schön's theory of reflective practice, which emphasizes that effective professionals learn from action, reflect on practical experience, and use the results of reflection to improve subsequent actions [3]. In educational contexts, teachers are not only expected to conduct instruction; they also need to review the learning process, identify obstacles, assess the effectiveness of strategies, and design improvements. Therefore, reflective culture needs to be understood as a collective school habit that enables teachers to learn systematically from instructional experiences.

The urgency of this study is reinforced by preliminary data from the Education Report Card at one elementary school in Sagulung District, Batam City. Indicators D.1 Learning Quality, D.2 Reflection and Improvement, and D.3 Instructional Leadership were each at a score of 58, or in the moderate category. Sub-indicators related to learning methods, classroom

management, innovative practices, learning about instruction, reflective support, and curriculum management also showed the same score. These data indicate that learning has been implemented, but the quality of methods, classroom management, innovation, teacher reflection, and instructional leadership support still need to be strengthened.

Initial observations showed that learning in the school had been running operationally; however, learning management had not been fully integrated with systematic quality-improvement strategies. The shift-based learning system created challenges in time management, classroom dynamics, and adjustment of instructional strategies. In addition, teacher reflection and supervision based on actual classroom conditions had not been implemented optimally. This indicates that the field problem is not merely a technical instructional issue, but is also related to how principals lead learning, provide reflective support, and build a culture of continuous improvement.

Previous studies show that principals' instructional leadership is closely related to teachers' professional development. [4] found that principals' instructional leadership is a predictor of teachers' professional development. [5] showed that instructional leadership has a positive effect on teacher self-efficacy and performance. [6] also found that teachers' perceptions of instructional leadership influence occupational well-being through instructional efficacy and awareness of professional development. These findings demonstrate the importance of principals' leadership in encouraging teachers to grow professionally.

Nevertheless, these studies have mostly emphasized the effects of instructional leadership on professional development, self-efficacy, performance, and teacher well-being. Studies that specifically explain how principals strengthen teacher reflective culture as a professional culture in the context of public elementary schools remain limited. Therefore, this study focuses on principals' instructional leadership practices, the obstacles encountered, and the efforts made to strengthen teachers' reflective culture in public elementary schools in Sagulung District, Batam City.

The objectives of this study are: (1) to analyze and describe principals' instructional leadership in strengthening teachers' reflective culture; (2) to analyze the obstacles faced by principals in strengthening teachers' reflective culture; and (3) to analyze principals' efforts to overcome obstacles in strengthening teachers' reflective culture in public elementary schools in Sagulung District, Batam City.

2. Research Method

This study used a qualitative approach with a phenomenological design. This approach was chosen because the study aimed to understand the experiences, views, and meanings

constructed by principals and teachers regarding instructional leadership in strengthening teachers' reflective culture. Through phenomenology, the researcher sought to capture the meanings of informants' experiences concerning the implementation of instructional leadership, the obstacles encountered, and the efforts undertaken to build reflective culture as part of improving learning quality.

The study was conducted in public elementary schools in Sagulung District, Batam City, in March 2026. The research site was selected because it was relevant to the focus of the study, namely principals' instructional leadership, teachers' reflective culture, and improvement of learning quality. The research subjects consisted of principals and teachers who were directly involved in the learning process and in strengthening reflective culture. Principals were selected because they act as instructional leaders, whereas teachers were selected because they implement instruction and experience reflection in teaching practice. Informants were determined through purposive sampling.

Data were collected through interviews, observations, and documentation. Interviews were used to explore informants' experiences and views regarding principals' instructional leadership, obstacles to reflection, and efforts to strengthen teacher reflection. Observations were conducted to examine school activities, principal-teacher interactions, supervision implementation, evaluation meetings, and teacher reflection forums. Documentation was used to complement the data, including school work programs, academic supervision documents, reflection notes, meeting minutes, teacher learning community or KKG documents, and Education Report Card data.

Data analysis was carried out continuously from data collection to report preparation. This study used the Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña analysis model, which includes data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification [7]. The data were selected, simplified, grouped according to the research focus, and then presented in narrative form. Conclusions were drawn gradually by verifying the findings through consistency among interview, observation, and documentation data. Data trustworthiness was strengthened through source triangulation and technique triangulation.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Principals' Instructional Leadership in Strengthening Teachers' Reflective Culture

The findings show that principals' instructional leadership began with the formulation of a learning vision oriented toward quality improvement. The principal stated, "The learning vision in our school is determined based on the results of the Education Report Card evaluation and students' needs. The direction of learning does not focus only on outcomes, but also on a quality learning process. We socialize this vision to all teachers so that it

becomes a shared guideline for teaching" (KS-F1-P1). This statement indicates that the principal used data and students' needs as the basis for formulating the direction of learning.

Observation findings showed that the principal actively communicated directions related to learning quality in meetings and teacher discussions. Documentation of the school profile, vision and mission, and principal work program also showed that improving learning quality was a priority. Teachers understood this direction and adjusted their instructional practices to the school vision. One teacher stated, "We understand that the learning direction given by the principal emphasizes improving the quality of instruction. This is usually conveyed in meetings or school activities, so we can adjust our teaching methods to that vision" (G-F1-P1).

Instructional leadership was also evident in the implementation of academic supervision. The principal stated, "We conduct academic supervision periodically. Usually, we enter the classroom to observe the learning process directly, followed by a discussion with the teacher about what has gone well and what needs improvement" (KS-F1-P3). This supervision was not merely evaluative, but became a space for reflective dialogue between the principal and teachers. Teachers also confirmed that "after classroom observation, there is a discussion about the strengths and weaknesses of instruction, so teachers know what needs to be improved in the next meeting" (G-F1-P3).

From the perspective of [2], these practices demonstrate the principal's function in defining the school mission, managing the instructional program, and building a learning climate. The principal carried out instructional leadership through a data-based vision, academic supervision, and feedback. However, the findings also show that reflection had not yet fully become a school culture. Reflection appeared more often after supervision or evaluation meetings and had not yet become a daily habit that was documented and followed up consistently.

3.2. Obstacles in Strengthening Teachers' Reflective Culture

The first obstacle was the uneven awareness among teachers regarding the importance of reflection. The principal explained, "There are still some teachers who do not realize the importance of reflection in learning. They think that teaching is enough without needing to conduct an in-depth evaluation" (KS-F2-P9). Teachers also stated that reflection was important, but it had not been carried out routinely and often occurred only when there was an evaluation from the principal (G-F2-P9). This shows that reflection had not yet become a professional habit embedded among all teachers.

The second obstacle was limited time and high workload. The principal stated that limited time was the main obstacle in supervising and coaching teachers because not all teachers could be supervised optimally (KS-F2-P10). Teachers also stated that

teaching and administrative workloads often caused reflection to be overlooked (G-F2-P14). Observations showed that teachers' activities were quite dense, especially in schools with a shift system, so time for reflective discussion and reflection documentation was limited.

The third obstacle was the absence of a structured reflection system. Documentation showed that teachers' reflection notes were not evenly available and that follow-up formats were not used consistently. As a result, reflection outcomes did not always become measurable instructional improvement plans. Within the reflective practice framework, this condition indicates that reflection had not yet moved from individual experience to systematic professional practice [3], [8]. Reflection needs to be supported by instruments, schedules, learning communities, and follow-up actions so that it becomes a school culture rather than a temporary activity.

3.3. Principals' Efforts to Overcome Obstacles

Principals undertook several efforts to overcome obstacles in strengthening reflective culture. The first effort was to strengthen supervision gradually and collaboratively. The principal stated, "We try to schedule supervision gradually. In addition, we involve the vice principal and senior teachers to assist with coaching so that supervision can run more effectively" (KS-F3-P15). The involvement of senior teachers broadened coaching support and reduced dependence on the principal as the sole source of feedback.

The second effort was to provide reflection forums through evaluation meetings, learning communities, and Teacher Working Groups (KKG). The principal explained that these forums were used as spaces for teachers to discuss, share experiences, and engage in joint reflection (KS-F3-P16). Teachers stated that the forums helped them obtain input to improve instruction (G-F3-P16). This finding aligns with the view that teacher professional development is stronger when it is carried out in collaborative, contextual, and sustainable learning communities [9].

The third effort was to encourage follow-up from reflection results. Documentation showed the presence of meeting minutes, supervision schedules, and follow-up notes from supervision results. Although not yet fully consistent, this step is important because effective reflection does not stop at identifying problems but continues into changes in instructional strategies. [10] emphasizes that reflection is meaningful when it helps teachers understand teaching practice and produces more conscious professional learning. Therefore, principals need to connect reflection with instructional improvement plans, peer mentoring, and evaluation of follow-up results.

In general, this study strengthens the findings of that instructional leadership is related to teachers' professional development. This study is also consistent with [5], who showed

the influence of instructional leadership on teacher self-efficacy and performance, and with [6], who emphasized the importance of instructional leadership for teacher well-being and professional awareness. The contribution of this study lies in explaining that instructional leadership should not be understood merely as supervision or monitoring, but must develop into a reflection ecosystem that includes vision, feedback, collegial forums, documentation, and follow-up.

4. Conclusion

The instructional leadership of principals in public elementary schools in Sagulung District, Batam City, has played a role in directing learning quality improvement through the establishment of a data-based vision, implementation of academic supervision, provision of feedback, and creation of an open and collaborative school climate. Principals do not merely carry out administrative functions; they also act as instructional drivers through reflective dialogue and support for teachers' professional development. However, teachers' reflective culture has not yet been fully formed systematically, so reflective practice remains partial, situational, and not yet sustainable across all learning activities.

The main obstacles in strengthening reflective culture include uneven teacher awareness, limited time due to teaching and administrative workloads, and the absence of a structured reflection system. To overcome these obstacles, principals have strengthened supervision gradually and collaboratively, provided reflection forums through KKG, learning communities, and evaluation meetings, and encouraged follow-up of reflection results in the form of instructional improvement. Thus, the success of strengthening reflective culture depends greatly on the consistency of instructional leadership, support from the school system, and teachers' active involvement in making reflection a sustainable professional practice.

As an implication, schools need to develop a simple reflection format that is used routinely, establish schedules for reflective discussions, connect supervision results with follow-up plans, and utilize teacher learning communities as spaces for sharing good practices. Future research is recommended to involve more elementary schools and to test a model for strengthening reflective culture based on collaborative supervision in order to obtain a broader picture of the effectiveness of instructional leadership in improving learning quality.

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