



## The Strategy of the School Principal in the Sekolah Penggerak Program at High Schools in Indragiri Hilir Regency

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### ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze: 1) the leadership strategy of school principals in the School Movement Program at high schools in Indragiri Hilir Regency; 2) efforts to enhance the program; and 3) the supporting and inhibiting factors of the principal's leadership strategy. A qualitative research method using field observation and interviews was employed. The research, conducted from November to December 2024, utilized interviews, observations, and documentation. Findings reveal that the leadership strategy focuses on innovative, technology-based learning, fostering collaboration, and teacher development. Success is seen in improved teacher competency, curriculum adaptation, and effective program management. Challenges include teacher adaptation to new methods and limited resources, which the principal addresses through additional training, technical support, and a collaborative work culture.

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## INTRODUCTION

Education is a key factor in developing quality human resources, which in turn determines the progress of a nation. Schools play a strategic role as formal institutions that facilitate the learning process. In the global effort to enhance educational quality, Indonesia has launched various programs and policies, one of which is the School Driving Program (PSP) initiated by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology of the Republic of Indonesia. This program aims to encourage the transformation of schools through improving the quality of learning and student learning outcomes.

The School Driving Program is part of the Merdeka Belajar policy, which focuses on transforming the education system to be more student-centered, strengthening teacher competencies, and fostering a school culture that supports active and collaborative learning. According to Nur (2021), this program aims to empower schools to adapt to the times and create innovations in the learning process. Syafi'i (2021) further added that the School Driving Program aims to realize Indonesia's educational vision in creating Pancasila students.

The school principal plays a crucial role in driving change within the school. According to the National Education System Law (Law No. 20 of 2003), the principal functions not only as an administrator but also as a visionary leader who can inspire and facilitate the improvement of educational quality. However, this transformation cannot occur automatically. Based on the Ministry of Education and Culture Regulation (Permendikbud) No. 6 of 2018, principals need effective leadership strategies to translate the vision of the School Driving Program into tangible actions.

The principal acts as the primary driver in guiding and developing the school while optimizing available resources. Kasiman (2020) states that the principal is the key to success in educational management. By implementing effective leadership strategies, the principal can become the driving force in achieving the goals of the School Driving Program, namely improving the quality of learning holistically.

However, the challenges faced by principals in implementing the School Driving Program are significant. Many principals lack an understanding of the program's objectives and how it works, leading to less effective implementation. Additionally, there are challenges in the development of the Merdeka curriculum, which needs to be tailored to the school climate, as well as the lack of coordination and periodic evaluations with school stakeholders. Research by Fullan (2017) shows that principals who successfully lead educational transformations are those who can become change agents, build a vision, and create a conducive learning environment.

Transformational leadership, as explained by Hargreaves & Fink (2016), is crucial in creating a culture that allows for innovation and sustainable change. However, research by Fitrah (2017) found that principals in Indonesia tend to focus more on managerial aspects rather than instructional leadership, which is a major obstacle in implementing the PSP.

According to the guidelines and educational assessment standards issued by the National Education Standards Agency (BSNP), priority indicators that reflect the quality of educational units show that while some aspects have reached the "good" category, such as student character and security climate, there are still significant challenges in literacy, numeracy, and the quality of learning, which remain in the "moderate" category. This indicates the need for more intensive efforts to improve educational quality.

This study aims to explore the leadership strategies of school principals in implementing the School Driving Program at the senior high school level in Indragiri Hilir District. The focus of this research is to identify the challenges faced by principals in program implementation, such as the lack of understanding among teachers about the Merdeka Belajar concept, limitations in supporting facilities, and low participation from students and parents.

The Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (2021) defines the characteristics of a School Driving Program, including proactive leadership, student-centered learning, character development, collaboration with the community, innovation in learning, and holistic assessment. However, in practice, many principals still struggle to understand and apply these policies.

Effective school leadership is identified as a determining factor for a school's success in facing challenges. Harris (2017) mentions that principals with participatory and inclusive leadership styles are better able to encourage the participation of all school community members in the change process. Such leadership can increase ownership of the school's vision and foster collaboration between teachers, students, and parents. However, the challenges in implementing the School Driving Program include a lack of understanding of the program's goals, as well as limitations in involving teachers and other stakeholders in the planning and implementation of the program.

Based on field interviews and observations, several key issues were found that affect the effectiveness of the principal's leadership in the School Driving Program. First, principals often fail to align the strategies implemented with the specific needs of the school, such as student characteristics and environmental conditions. Second, the lack of a clear plan to support teacher professional development affects teachers' ability to apply the strategies required by the program. Third, principals do not consistently monitor and evaluate the program's implementation, making it difficult to identify issues in a timely manner.

The priority indicator table from the education report card shows that while some aspects have achieved the "good" category, such as student character and security climate, there are still significant challenges in literacy, numeracy, and the quality of learning, which remain in the "moderate" category. This suggests that, despite progress in some areas, more intensive and targeted efforts are needed to improve the quality of learning, as well as literacy and numeracy skills, in order to achieve the national education quality improvement targets.

This study aims to further explore the strategies employed by school principals to address these challenges, whether through visionary leadership, strengthened collaboration, or optimization of available school resources. Consequently, this research is expected to provide strategic recommendations to enhance the effectiveness of the School Driving Program implementation at the school level.

School principals are expected not only to function as managers but also as leaders who can drive change, motivate teachers and staff to adopt more effective teaching methods, and create a learning environment that supports the development of students' competencies. In this context, transformational leadership becomes vital, as principals must build collective commitment from all school members toward a shared vision and overcome challenges that arise during the change process.

Thus, this study will provide a clearer picture of the challenges and strategies faced by principals in implementing the School Driving Program and offer recommendations to improve the program's effectiveness in the future.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Leadership Strategy of School Principals**

The concept of school leadership (principalship) describes the role of the principal as an educational leader who manages and leads a school to create an effective learning environment. Several relevant leadership theories apply, such as Transformational Leadership Theory, which views principals as sources of inspiration and motivation for innovation and positive culture; Instructional Leadership Theory, focusing on curriculum management and evaluation; Situational Leadership Theory, emphasizing flexibility in adapting leadership styles; Visionary Leadership Theory, which stresses the need for a clear vision for the future of the school; and Collaborative Leadership Theory, which highlights the importance of collaboration among principals, teachers, students, parents, and the community.

Principals have the responsibility to create a conducive learning environment, foster positive relationships, and enhance learning outcomes.

Leadership is seen in the characteristics, behaviors, and influence on others. Principals must inspire and motivate teachers and students to achieve higher educational goals. Their strategic roles include being leaders, managers, administrators, supervisors, innovators, and motivators. These roles help improve teacher competence, manage school operations, ensure the quality of education, encourage innovation, and foster a supportive work culture.

Effective leadership strategies are essential to ensure that school programs align with the school's vision and mission. Key strategies include the development of teacher competence, curriculum improvement, and the use of technology in learning. A principal must apply transformational leadership, effective communication, team collaboration, professional development, and a positive school culture. These strategies support educational programs, such as the School Moving Program, to improve learning quality, school management, and student outcomes.

An effective principal is also a change agent who fosters a collaborative environment by involving teachers, parents, and the community in planning and implementing educational programs. Continuous professional development for teachers is a priority, enhancing their skills and knowledge, which positively impacts teaching quality. Creating a positive school culture is also crucial for motivating everyone to contribute effectively to the educational process.

In conclusion, an effective school leadership strategy involves shared vision development, communication, team collaboration, teacher professional development, and fostering a positive school culture. These strategies help implement programs like the School Moving Program and improve education quality, student development, and the overall school performance.

### **Sekolah Penggerak Program**

**Program Sekolah Penggerak (PSP)** is an initiative launched by Indonesia's Minister of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology under Decree Number 371/M/2021. This program aims to drive educational transformation and enhance students' learning outcomes holistically, focusing on both cognitive and non-cognitive competencies. The initiative aligns with the vision of Indonesian Education, particularly in developing the Profile of Pancasila Students, with school principals and teachers playing crucial roles in this process (Patilima, 2021).

School principals are expected to be more than administrators; they must inspire and facilitate educational quality improvement. According to Law No. 14 of 2005, principals are teachers assigned additional duties to lead the school. In this context, principals must integrate their teaching professionalism with managerial leadership competencies to achieve educational goals. Sheppard et

al. (2018) describe principals as leaders who create ecosystems for teacher learning and foster enthusiasm for quality learning.

PSP involves five key interventions: consultative mentoring, human resource strengthening, a new learning paradigm, data-driven planning, and school digitalization (Zamjani & Rekan, 2021). The Ministry of Education provides consultative mentoring to assist local governments in implementing the program. Human resource strengthening includes training for principals and teachers to improve their teaching and leadership competencies. The new learning paradigm is designed to shape the Profile of Pancasila Students, which includes values such as critical and creative thinking.

Data-driven planning is emphasized in school management, where schools apply School-Based Management (SBM) to identify strengths and areas needing improvement. School digitalization aims to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of educational management. The program seeks to create a safe, comfortable, and inclusive learning environment and encourages collaboration between schools, parents, and communities.

The main objectives of PSP are to improve literacy, numeracy, and students' character, while also strengthening the competencies of teachers and principals. It aims to foster collaboration among educational stakeholders. Makarim (2020) highlights that the program focuses on developing students' competencies and character through improved learning quality.

However, challenges remain in implementing PSP. Many principals still struggle to understand and apply this policy, hindering the program's success. Research by Fitriah (2017) reveals that Indonesian principals often focus more on managerial aspects than instructional leadership, which obstructs PSP implementation.

Effective leadership, as identified by Harris (2017), is a determining factor in overcoming challenges in schools. Principals with participatory and inclusive leadership styles are more capable of engaging the entire school community in the change process. Furthermore, principals must foster a culture of innovation and collaboration, in line with Fullan's (2017) transformational leadership theory.

Overall, PSP is designed to positively impact local governments and educational units by accelerating educational transformation through enhanced quality and competencies. The program aims to create sustainable effects across the education ecosystem. With a comprehensive approach, PSP focuses on holistic student learning outcomes and strengthening the competencies of teachers and principals.

In conclusion, **Program Sekolah Penggerak** is a strategic step to transform Indonesia's education system to meet 21st-century needs. By involving all

stakeholders in the educational process, the program is expected to improve education quality and produce competent, creative generations ready for global challenges.

### **Relevant Research**

Several previous studies have shown that school leadership plays a crucial role in the successful implementation of the School Driving Program (PSP). Sembiring (2023) identified eight indicators of effective school leadership, including involving all school members in vision development and monitoring teacher performance. Supporting factors such as quality human resources and strong teamwork contribute to success, while hindering factors include a lack of care from subordinates.

Tantawi (2024) researched the role of principals in implementing PSP at SMPN 18 Banda Aceh, finding that the principal's strategies included establishing rules and discipline, although challenges such as a lack of books and confusion among teachers about learning modules persisted. Hikmah (2024) emphasized that a principal's social leadership greatly influences PSP implementation, with clear planning, organizing, and supervising stages.

Mariana (2021) highlighted that a principal's leadership is the driving force behind an organization, affecting the success of a school in achieving educational goals. Utaminingsih & Sofiyati (2023) showed that leading principals had conducted planning, implementation, and evaluation in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, demonstrating leadership effectiveness.

Ramdani (2023) found that school leadership and teacher motivation significantly influenced PSP implementation, with strong F-values indicating a substantial effect. Meldafani (2023) emphasized that the characteristics of school leadership were close to the "Power of Leadership" theory, supported by good communication and adequate resources.

Holdi (2023) showed that the role of school leadership in institutional development and teacher motivation improvement was rated very highly. Lestari & Sari (2024) stressed the collaboration between school leaders and other schools in communities of practice, as well as their roles as educators and innovators.

Based on these studies, it can be concluded that school leadership functions not only as administrative managers but also as catalysts for change. Transformational leadership theory by Burns (2018) and collaborative leadership theory highlights the importance of principals in building shared visions and encouraging stakeholder participation.

However, challenges such as limited training, inadequate resources, and teachers' lack of understanding of new modules still need to be addressed. With an adaptive leadership approach, principals can create innovative and collaborative environments, supporting the improvement of education quality and shaping the Profile of Pancasila Students. The School Driving Program is expected to have a positive impact not only on the involved schools but also on other schools through the dissemination of good practices.

The research questions are as follows:

- a. What leadership strategies are implemented by the school principal to improve the implementation of the School Driving Program at senior high schools in Indragiri Hilir Regency?
- b. How is the development of success in the implementation of the School Driving Program at senior high schools in Indragiri Hilir Regency?
- c. What are the supporting and inhibiting factors of the principal's leadership strategy in the School Driving Program at senior high schools in Indragiri Hilir Regency?

## METHODS

This study adopts a qualitative approach, which, according to Moleong (2017), generates descriptive data in the form of written or oral words from individuals and observable behaviors. The methods applied include field observation and interviews, with a focus on understanding social phenomena and human issues. The researcher aims to depict the complexity of the situation through qualitative descriptive reports, reflecting the perspectives of the respondents and the context being studied, thereby providing profound insights into the observed phenomena.

This research was conducted at two senior high schools in Indragiri Hilir Regency, namely Tembilahan 2 Senior High School and Bina Bhakti Sapat Senior High School, from November to December 2024. The selection of these locations was based on the presence of leadership-related issues in the School Driving Program, which are relevant to the research topic, and the absence of similar studies at these schools. The researcher has obtained permission from the school authorities to collect data, which is expected to strengthen the research findings and provide deeper insights into the program's implementation in the local context.

The data sources in this study are divided into two categories: primary and secondary data. According to Sugiyono (2019), primary data is obtained directly through interviews with informants, in this case, the school principals and teachers at senior high schools in Indragiri Hilir Regency. On the other hand, secondary data includes information from books, theses, journals, and related documents that support the analysis of the school principal's leadership in enhancing teacher commitment. Naufian (2018) emphasizes that selecting

appropriate data sources is crucial to ensuring the success of the research, with both types of data complementing each other to provide a comprehensive understanding.

This study employs a qualitative approach using interviews, observations, and document analysis to gather data. Semi-structured interviews are conducted with school principals and teachers in senior high schools in Indragiri Hilir Regency, allowing the researcher to gather flexible and in-depth insights into their experiences and perspectives. Observations provide a direct view of the school environment, focusing on the implementation of school leadership and the dynamics between staff and students. Additionally, document analysis of materials such as strategic plans and implementation reports complements the interviews and observations, offering a deeper understanding of the leadership strategies within the School Driving Program.

The study ensures data validity through triangulation, involving multiple data sources and methods, such as surveys and structured interviews. This strengthens the credibility and dependability of the findings. Data analysis follows the steps of condensation, display, and conclusion drawing, as outlined by Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014). Verbatim transcripts of interviews are analyzed to identify key themes and challenges, with thematic analysis used to uncover relationships between these themes. The data is organized into tables and descriptive narratives, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the implementation of the School Driving Program and reinforcing the study's validity through triangulation.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

### **School Principal Leadership Strategies in Supporting the School Driving Program**

The school principal plays a key role as the main driving force behind the success of the School Driving Program's implementation. The strategies applied include intensive teacher training through training programs, subject-based workshops, and certification for driving teachers to improve teaching quality. Furthermore, the principal encourages the integration of technology in the learning process, such as using Gemini AI, to facilitate project-based and problem-based learning. This strategy is designed to develop 21st-century skills in students, including creativity, communication, collaboration, and problem-solving.

This research aligns with studies by Supriyanto et al. (2021), which emphasize that transformational leadership by the school principal, focusing on innovation and strengthening educators' competencies, is an essential element in driving project-based learning in the digital era. Additionally, research by Suyatno et al. (2020) shows that school principals who can build a clear vision and empower teachers through training and collaboration result in significant improvements in educational quality.

However, this study has limitations. First, the research location is limited to two schools in the Kuala Kampar District, so the results may not be generalized to other schools. Second, this study refers only to specific theories, such as Yukl's (2013) leadership theory and Herzberg's (1959) motivation theory, without considering all relevant theories. Third, the research was conducted within a specific timeframe, which could influence the dynamics and changes after the research period ends. Therefore, the results may not fully reflect the more dynamic conditions, leaving room for further research to explore these aspects.

### **Efforts to Develop the Success of the School Driving Program Implementation**

The success of the School Driving Program requires well-planned and sustainable development efforts. The principal plays a crucial role in ensuring that teachers receive relevant training, not only in pedagogical competencies but also in mastering technology and classroom management skills. Academic supervision is regularly conducted to provide constructive feedback, help teachers overcome challenges, and ensure the program runs as planned.

These findings align with research by Aini et al. (2020), which shows that regular teacher training and academic supervision are key factors in supporting the success of the School Driving Program. The study also notes that learning communities among teachers become an effective medium for sharing experiences and innovations. Furthermore, research by Fullan & Quinn (2016) revealed that successful educational transformation requires a collaborative and continuous learning approach.

Support from the education department, in the form of funding, facilities, and policies that facilitate program implementation, also strengthens the program's effectiveness. The use of the school's Annual Work Plan (RKTS) as a strategic guide is also an important element to maintain consistency with the school's vision and goals. Through this integrated and collaborative approach, the principal can create an environment that supports the success of the School Driving Program and prepares students to face future challenges.

### **Supporting and Hindering Factors in the School Principal Leadership Strategy**

Key supporting factors in the implementation of the School Driving Program include the principal's commitment to improving teacher competencies through training, supervision, and certification. Support from the education department, which provides budgets, facilities, and policies that facilitate program implementation, is also crucial. In addition, the use of technology in administrative management and learning, as well as communicative and collaborative leadership, ensures active involvement from all parties, including teachers, staff, students, and the community.

However, there are several barriers, such as resistance from some teachers to new teaching methods, limited time for program implementation, budget constraints, and rapid and inconsistent policy changes. These results are in line

with research by Prasetyo and Dewi (2019), which found that the main challenges in implementing innovation-based programs often stem from resistance to change, especially among teachers accustomed to conventional methods. They emphasize the importance of open communication and ongoing training to address these barriers.

Research by Nurdin and Damayanti (2021) supports these findings, showing that collaborative leadership, which involves teachers in decision-making, can reduce resistance and create a sense of ownership of the program. Moreover, appropriate use of technology and adequate technical support helps schools overcome budget and time limitations, thereby improving the effectiveness of the School Driving Program's implementation.

This research has several limitations that need to be considered. First, the research locations in Tembilahan 2 Senior High School and Bina Bhakti Sapat Senior High School face challenges related to social-cultural diversity, infrastructure limitations, and technology access, requiring adaptive leadership strategies. The school principal must play the role of a visionary change agent, accommodating the differing characteristics of schools in both urban and rural areas. Second, this study only refers to a limited set of theories, so the theoretical perspectives used may not cover all dimensions relevant to the phenomena under investigation. Third, the research was conducted within a specific timeframe, which could affect the dynamics and changes that may occur after the research period ends. Therefore, the results may not fully reflect the more dynamic conditions over time, leaving room for future research to explore these aspects further.

## CONCLUSION

- a. **Leadership Strategy:** Tembilahan 2 Senior High School emphasizes intensive training, certification for driving teachers, and cross-party collaboration. In contrast, Bina Bhakti Sapat Senior High School integrates technology like Gemini AI and develops Annual Work Plans (RKTS) for strategic planning.
- b. **Development Efforts:** Tembilahan 2 Senior High School focuses on strengthening teacher competencies through project-based methods, while Bina Bhakti Sapat Senior High School prioritizes digital training to support technology implementation.
- c. **Supporting and Hinderling Factors:** Tembilahan 2 Senior High School is supported by collaboration with the education department, but faces challenges in adapting new methods among teachers. At Bina Bhakti Sapat Senior High School, technological support is an advantage, yet budget and time constraints pose significant challenges.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- a. Schools should develop teacher training programs focused on project-based learning and technology integration to support innovative teaching methods. Detailed and flexible annual work plans are also essential to anticipate policy changes or unforeseen obstacles. Increasing parental and community involvement is crucial for supporting the program's implementation through intensive collaboration.
- b. Teachers are encouraged to remain open to new teaching methods by actively participating in training and certification. Developing learning communities within schools can help share best practices.
- c. For future research, it is important to explore the impact of the School Driving Program on student learning outcomes and character development. Investigating the effectiveness of collaborative leadership approaches across different geographical contexts could provide a broader understanding of educational development for improvement.

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