



Strategic Management of School Principals in Transforming Education Quality Based on the Independent Curriculum in Elementary Schools

Maya Nelly Syarifah^{1✉}, Maula Nurul Inaya², Ida Tejawiani³

Universitas Islam Nusantara

Email : 1mayanellysyarifah@uninus.ac.id

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ABSTRACT

This research is motivated by the urgent role of leadership in overseeing the transition to the national curriculum to improve the quality of learning at the elementary school level. The main focus of this study is to analyze how principals implement strategic management stages in transforming educational quality in line with the values of the Independent Curriculum. The purpose of this study is to describe and analyze the strategy formulation, program implementation, and strategic evaluation conducted by principals at SDN Rasamulya. This research uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive analysis study design. Data were collected through participant observation, in-depth interviews with principals, teachers, and committees, and documentation studies related to the school's strategic plan. Data analysis techniques included data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing, with data validity tested using source and technique triangulation. The results indicate that: (1) Strategy formulation was conducted through a participatory SWOT analysis with an emphasis on strengthening the Pancasila student profile; (2) Strategy implementation was realized through revitalizing internal learning communities, adapting digital-based teaching tools, and optimizing an inclusive learning environment; (3) Strategic evaluation is conducted periodically through guided reflection and formative academic supervision. Research findings confirm that the success of quality transformation is highly dependent on the principal's ability to synergize school resources with the flexibility of the Independent Curriculum. The implications of this research suggest the importance of strengthening managerial literacy for principals in facing the dynamics of changing education policies.

Keywords: *Strategic Management, Principals, Education Quality, Independent Curriculum*

INTRODUCTION

The changing global landscape of the 21st century positions education as a strategic instrument in developing adaptive human resources with character and the capacity for critical thinking. Education is no longer understood merely as a process of transferring knowledge, but rather as a planned effort to develop students' holistic competencies. In the Indonesian context, this orientation is actualized through the Independent Curriculum policy, which provides educational units with the flexibility to manage learning contextually according to the needs and characteristics of students.

Elementary schools are the main foundation of the national education system, so the quality of curriculum policy implementation at this level will determine the success of education at subsequent levels. Although the Independent Curriculum is designed with the principles of flexibility and student-centeredness, its implementation at the elementary school level still faces complex challenges, particularly related to teacher readiness, school organizational culture, and the school's ability to translate macro policies into micro-learning practices. The paradigm shift toward student-centered learning requires not only pedagogical changes but also strategic changes in the way schools are managed.

In this situation, the role of the principal is crucial in ensuring the success of the transformation of educational quality. Principals are not merely required to be administrators, but also strategic leaders capable of understanding the dynamics of the school's internal and external environment, formulating development directions, and mobilizing all resources in an integrated manner. However, previous studies have tended to focus the implementation of the Independent Curriculum solely on teacher pedagogy or curriculum policy, while the strategic management dimension of principals is often discussed normatively and has not been thoroughly examined in the context of actual practice in elementary schools.

This gap indicates that the transformation of educational quality based on the Independent Curriculum is not adequately understood as a change in teaching materials, but rather as a continuous managerial process. Without a systematically designed strategy—from environmental analysis and needs-based program formulation to targeted implementation and reflective evaluation—curriculum policy has the potential to become bogged down in administrative fulfillment and fail to address the substance of improving learning quality. Therefore, the focus of this study needs to be directed at how principals operationalize strategic management within the context of limited resources and the demands of rapid change.

Based on this reality, this study focuses on the strategic management practices of principals in overseeing the transformation of educational quality based on the Independent Curriculum in elementary schools. Using a qualitative approach, this study examines in-depth the process of strategy formulation,

program implementation, and evaluation mechanisms carried out by school principals as a unified managerial system. This approach reveals the contextual and adaptive dynamics of strategic leadership, which have not been widely explored in elementary education management studies.

Thus, this study not only provides an empirical overview of the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in elementary schools but also offers a new perspective on the role of principals' strategic management as a key factor in bridging national education policy with quality improvement practices at the educational unit level.

METHODOLOGY

This research employed a qualitative approach with a case study design to gain a deeper understanding of the principal's strategic management practices in transforming educational quality based on the Independent Curriculum. The qualitative approach was chosen because it allowed the researcher to explore the process, meaning, and dynamics of strategic leadership contextually within the school environment.

The research was conducted at Rasamulya Elementary School in Bandung Regency. Research informants were purposively selected, including one principal, ten teachers, and the school committee directly involved in the planning and implementation of the educational quality improvement program. The research focused on the formulation and implementation of the principal's strategic management, including the academic supervision program and school activities that support the transformation of learning quality.

Data collection was conducted through direct observation of managerial and instructional activities, in-depth interviews with key informants, and documentation studies of school documents such as the educational unit's operational curriculum, work programs, and supervision reports. These three techniques were used in an integrated manner to obtain comprehensive and complementary data.

Data analysis was conducted interactively through the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and drawing and verifying conclusions. The analysis process was ongoing from data collection until the research was completed. Data validity is guaranteed through source and method triangulation techniques, as well as member checks to ensure the conformity of findings with factual conditions in the field.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

The results of the study indicate that the principal of Rasamulya Elementary School systematically implemented strategic management to oversee the transformation of educational quality based on the Independent Curriculum. This practice is reflected in three main stages: strategy formulation, strategy

implementation, and strategic evaluation and control.

In the strategy formulation stage, the principal conducted an internal and external environmental analysis using a participatory SWOT approach, involving teachers and the school committee. This analysis identified the school's strengths in teacher commitment and a collaborative culture, while key weaknesses lay in digital literacy and variations in teacher pedagogical competencies. The analysis results then served as the basis for aligning the school's vision and mission with the Pancasila Student Profile and the policy direction of the Independent Curriculum.

The strategy implementation stage was realized through several core programs, particularly cycle-based academic supervision, the formation of teacher learning communities (Kombel), and regular in-house training. Academic supervision was carried out through pre-observation, classroom observation, and post-observation stages, with an emphasis on constructive feedback. This program encouraged teachers to improve teaching practices and develop more student-centered teaching modules. Furthermore, the learning community serves as a collaborative space for teachers to share good practices and collectively resolve learning issues.

Strategic evaluation and monitoring are conducted continuously through guided reflection and formative supervision. Evaluation is not solely oriented toward final results, but also toward the process of improving teacher professionalism. Findings indicate positive changes in teacher professional behavior, improvements in the quality of teaching modules, and increased communication and collaboration among teachers in supporting the implementation of the Independent Curriculum.

Discussion

The findings of this study confirm that the success of educational quality transformation is significantly influenced by the principal's ability to fulfill his or her role as a strategic leader. The practice of participatory SWOT analysis aligns with the views of Wheelen and Hunger (2018), who emphasize the importance of environmental mapping as a foundation for formulating organizational strategy. In the elementary school context, this analysis enables the principal to design strategies that are responsive to the real needs of teachers and students.

The implementation of strategies through cycle-based academic supervision demonstrates that a formative coaching approach is more effective than solely administrative supervision. These findings support the opinions of Purwanto (2014) and Daresh (2001), who stated that academic supervision functions as a professional mentoring process to improve the quality of learning. Supervision accompanied by reflective feedback has been shown to encourage more sustainable changes in teacher teaching practices.

The formation of teacher learning communities also strengthens the transformation of educational quality through a collaborative culture. This practice aligns with the view of Robbins and Coulter (2012) that strategic leadership focuses not only on decision-making but also on the ability to mobilize and motivate

organizational members. In the implementation of the Independent Curriculum, learning communities become an important vehicle for aligning curriculum policies with classroom learning practices.

From an evaluation perspective, the application of guided reflection and formative supervision demonstrates that effective strategic control is not repressive, but rather adaptive and oriented towards continuous improvement. This reinforces strategic management theory, which positions evaluation as a cyclical process to ensure strategy remains relevant to environmental dynamics (Pearce & Robinson, 2017).

Overall, the results of this study expand the study of educational management by demonstrating that the Independent Curriculum requires not only pedagogical change but also managerial transformation at the educational unit level. These findings confirm that the principal's strategic management is an important bridge between national education policy and improving the quality of learning in elementary schools.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the principal's strategic management at Rasamulya Elementary School is implemented systematically and structured through four main stages: environmental analysis, strategy formulation, strategy implementation, and evaluation and control. The environmental analysis, conducted through SWOT mapping, enabled the principal to identify key teacher weaknesses, particularly in mastery of technology-based learning media and the development of higher-order thinking (HOTS) questions. This enabled the formulated strategy to be contextual and based on the school's real needs.

The implementation of this management strategy demonstrates the principal's role as a strategic leader focused on teacher professional development and mentoring. Strategy implementation focused on cycle-based academic supervision, strengthening learning communities, and internal training that fostered a collaborative work culture and increased teacher motivation. This approach created a supportive work climate, encouraging teachers to carry out their professional duties more optimally.

The success of the education quality improvement program is reflected in positive changes in teacher competencies, including the ability to design innovative lesson plans, implement contextual learning, and improve pedagogical, professional, and social competencies in daily practice. This impact is reinforced by ongoing evaluation and control mechanisms, so that the strategies implemented remain adaptive and contribute significantly to improving the quality of learning in schools.

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