

Navigating Educational Excellence: A Deep Dive into Leadership Competencies for Principals

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Abstract: This article explores the leadership competencies of school principals in enhancing student-centered learning within the educational ecosystem. The study focuses on the importance of principal leadership in fostering an environment conducive to effective and inclusive learning. It highlights the challenges faced by principals, including limited resources, diverse student needs, and the need for effective communication with stakeholders such as parents and the wider community. Through a two-day workshop, principals were introduced to various leadership models, including strategies for managing change, formulating student-oriented policies, and leveraging technology to overcome resource constraints. The workshop outcomes emphasize the importance of a collaborative school culture, the role of parents as partners in education, and the need for principals to lead the development of a flexible, inclusive curriculum. The study concludes that strong leadership competencies in these areas will lead to improved educational outcomes, promoting a more inclusive and effective school ecosystem.

Keywords: Change Management, Collaborative Leadership, Education Quality, Inclusive Curriculum, Leadership Competencies, Parental Involvement, School Ecosystem, Student-Centered Learning, Teacher Professionalism, Technology Utilization.

Introduction

The principal holds a strategic role in enhancing the quality of education, serving not only as an administrative manager but also as a visionary instructional leader. As a formal leader, the principal is responsible for achieving educational objectives through the advancement of teaching staff professionalism and the creation of a school climate conducive to the effective and efficient implementation of the educational process (He et al., 2024; Lijun & Te, 2024; Pisriwati et al., 2024). The principal must be capable of managing and facilitating human and financial resources to ensure the successful attainment of the school's vision, mission, and objectives.

In carrying out their duties, principals face a variety of challenges. Limited resources, whether in terms of funding, facilities, or teaching staff, often pose significant obstacles to improving educational quality. Furthermore, the diverse characteristics of students, encompassing differences in backgrounds, needs, and learning styles, add complexity to the creation of inclusive and effective learning environments. The pressure to enhance educational quality from various stakeholders, including the government, parents, and the wider community, also presents a distinct challenge for principals (Fotheringham et al., 2022; Swargiary, 2024; Tamadoni et al., 2024). Therefore, it is essential

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for principals to possess strong leadership competencies and to continually innovate in seeking solutions to improve the quality of education in their schools.

A workshop discussing the leadership competency model for school principals provided in-depth insights into the critical role of principals in leading student-centered learning (Abdallah et al., 2024; Booth, 2023; Safira & Alamsyah, 2025). In this activity, participants were guided to identify the competencies required of an educational leader, such as the ability to manage human resources, formulate policies, and create environments that support effective learning. One of the key outcomes of the workshop was the recognition that principals must possess competencies in designing and implementing student-oriented policies, as well as the capacity to lead change in adapting curricula to align with students' needs and characteristics.

The workshop outcomes also underscored the importance of developing a school ecosystem that supports student-centered learning. Principals are expected to foster an inclusive school culture in which every student feels valued and is given the opportunity to develop according to their potential (DeMatthews et al., 2021; Gómez-Hurtado et al., 2021; Khaleel et al., 2021; Lijun & Te, 2024). Moreover, the role of parents as partners in the educational process received significant attention during the workshop. Principals were encouraged to engage parents as learning resources and as companions for students at school, thereby reinforcing the learning that takes place in the classroom. By enhancing principals' competencies in these areas, it is anticipated that a more effective education system will be established, one that is relevant to students' needs and capable of improving overall educational quality.

The significance of this workshop lies in the importance of developing leadership competencies in school principals to drive improvements in the quality of teaching and learning. Principals with strong leadership competencies are able to create a conducive learning environment, enhance the engagement of teachers and students, and design policies that support student-centered learning processes. Through this article, it is hoped that a deeper understanding of the leadership competency model for school principals, which is relevant to current educational needs, will be provided, while also broadening perspectives on the professional development of principals, which directly impacts the enhancement of educational quality in schools across Indonesia.

Method

This workshop was designed with the aim of enhancing the leadership competencies of school principals in leading student-centered learning. The workshop was conducted over two days, with the first day focusing more on independent activities and self-reflection, while the second day featured collaborative discussions and the development of actionable plans. The topics covered included the leadership competency model for schools, principles of student-centered learning, and how to build a student-oriented ecosystem. The sessions included self-analysis, concept exploration, group discussions, and contextual demonstrations, all intended to uncover the potential and challenges that principals face in realizing a better educational vision in their schools.

The primary participants in this workshop were school principals and school supervisors, who play strategic roles in the management and oversight of education at the school level. Most participants have backgrounds in educational management, but they come with varying levels of understanding and skills related to leadership in learning. Their motivations for attending this training vary, ranging from a desire to enhance their leadership abilities, address challenges in managing learning, to seeking ways to improve the quality of education in their respective schools. With these diverse backgrounds and experiences, the workshop aimed to strengthen their skills in designing and implementing student-centered educational strategies.

During the workshop, data were collected through various approaches to gain a comprehensive understanding of the participants' perceptions and development. The primary method used was in-depth interviews with participants to explore their views on leadership models and student-centered learning. Additionally, observations were made during the discussion sessions and collaborative activities to assess the participants' engagement and involvement. Data were also gathered through the analysis of participants' reflections, both those conducted independently in the form of worksheets and those discussed during group discussions. This approach is expected to provide insights into how

school principals perceive and implement leadership and learning principles in their schools, as well as to evaluate the extent to which the workshop has enhanced their competencies in these areas.

Result and Discussion

Understanding Leadership Competency Models

The results of the discussions and reflections among the participants regarding the leadership competency model revealed that principals must possess several core competencies to effectively lead student-centered learning. Participants agreed that the ability to manage educational change and innovation is a key competency that principals must have. They also emphasized the importance of strong communication skills, both in interactions with teachers, students, and parents, to create an inclusive learning environment that supports student development. Furthermore, principals need to have the ability to make data-driven decisions to design educational policies that are more responsive to the needs of students and the school community (Daniels et al., 2021; Elugbaju et al., 2024; Jhonshon et al., 2024; Schelling & Rubenstein, 2021).

Participants' reflections revealed that the competency of school principals in building and maintaining positive relationships with all educational stakeholders is crucial. Leadership based on a clear vision and mission, coupled with a willingness to engage directly in the learning process, was seen as vital in driving positive change within the school (Candrasari et al., 2023; Sliwka et al., 2024). Principals also recognized the importance of developing the professionalism of teachers and school staff so that they can effectively support the achievement of student-centered learning goals. With these competencies, principals are expected to create a more effective, inclusive learning ecosystem that can positively impact student development (Lijun & Te, 2024; Ortega et al., 2025).



Figure 1. Activities During the Discussion Session

Application of Student-Centered Learning Principles

The application of student-centered learning principles was one of the main focuses of this workshop, with participants, namely school principals, encouraged to explore ways to implement these principles in their schools. Based on the discussion results, principals must ensure that all policies and teaching practices in the school are oriented toward the needs and development of students. One of the steps taken is to create a flexible curriculum that is relevant to the interests and abilities of students, allowing them to learn actively and independently (Ni'mah et al., 2024; Tomlinson & Jarvis, 2023).

Principals must also support teachers in developing more innovative and interactive teaching methods, as well as provide space for students to voice their opinions and choices in the learning process.

To realize student-centered learning, principals need to cultivate a school culture that supports active student participation in all aspects of the learning activities. This can be achieved by developing an evaluation system that not only measures academic outcomes but also assesses the development of students' character and social skills. Furthermore, principals must strengthen the involvement of parents in their children's education, making them partners in supporting the learning process outside of school (Myende & Nhlumayo, 2022; Ngadni & Shuang, 2024; Yulianti et al., 2022). Thus, the application of this principle not only transforms teaching methods within the classroom but also creates a school ecosystem that better supports the holistic development of students.

The Role of Student-Centered Ecosystems

Participants in the workshop expressed a deep understanding of the importance of building a student-oriented ecosystem. This ecosystem encompasses various interrelated factors, ranging from an inclusive curriculum, student-centered teaching methods, to the involvement of parents and the community in the educational process. Principals need to create a school environment that is safe, comfortable, and supportive of students' physical, emotional, and intellectual development (Fredrick et al., 2021; Khaleel et al., 2021; Stronge & Xu, 2021). With a positive ecosystem, students will feel valued and have the opportunity to grow according to their potential, both inside and outside the classroom.

Participants also recognized that building a student-oriented school ecosystem is not an easy task. The greatest challenge faced is the limited resources, both in terms of budget and available facilities. Additionally, the diversity of students' needs and backgrounds presents a unique challenge in creating a fair and equitable ecosystem for all (Bhatt, 2024; Landsman & Lewis, 2023; Tariq, 2024). Principals must collaborate with teachers, parents, and the community to develop policies and practices that can address these challenges, while ensuring that each student receives the attention and support needed to develop to their full potential.

Parent Participation

Principals play a crucial role in encouraging parental participation as both a learning resource and a companion for students at school. Through effective communication, principals can invite parents to become more involved in their children's education process (Wachid et al., 2024; Yulianti et al., 2022). One way to achieve this is by organizing regular meetings or discussion forums where parents can share their experiences and perspectives on their children's development. Additionally, principals can involve parents in extracurricular activities and student development programs, which, in turn, can strengthen the collaboration between the school and families in supporting students' learning.

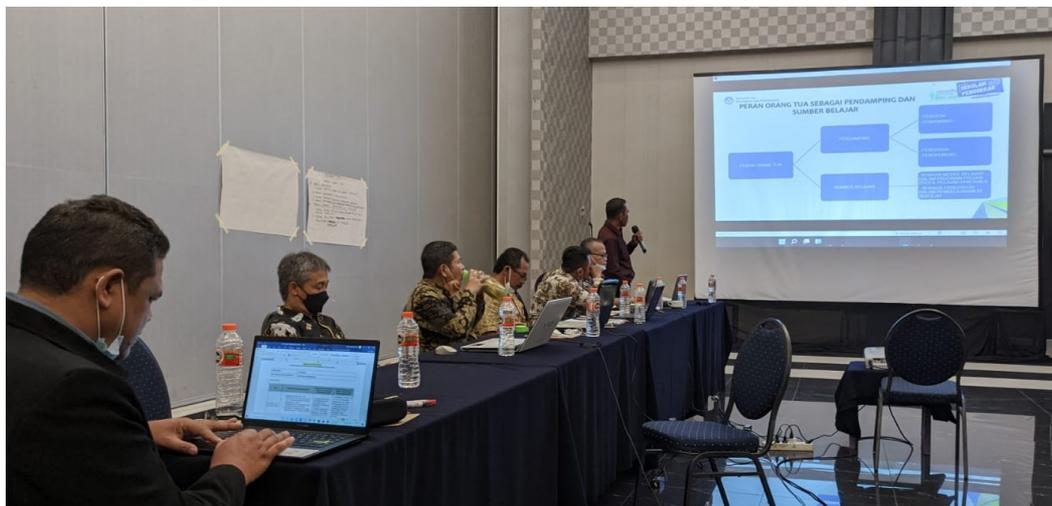


Figure 2. Group Presentation on the Role of Parents as Mentors and Learning Resources

It is also important for principals to provide a platform that facilitates structured communication between parents and the school, such as through digital applications or online communication groups. In this way, parents can actively monitor their children's progress, offer support at home, and contribute to the achievement of educational goals. Parental involvement can also include their role in providing feedback on policies or programs implemented at the school, which will further enhance the relevance of the education provided. By optimizing the role of parents as companions and learning resources, principals can create a more inclusive educational ecosystem that supports the holistic development of students.

Challenges and Solutions

The challenges faced by principals in implementing leadership competencies to support student-centered learning are diverse. One of the primary obstacles is the limitation of resources, including budget, facilities, and trained teaching staff. Principals often have to work with limited resources while the demands for improving educational quality continue to rise (Jhonshon et al., 2024; Stronge & Xu, 2021). Additionally, the diversity of students' needs and characteristics presents a challenge in creating a learning environment that is both inclusive and relevant to their development. Principals also face barriers in building effective collaboration with parents and the community, which are essential components in creating a student-oriented school ecosystem.

To address these challenges, several solutions were proposed during the workshop. One of the solutions is the development of principals' capacity to lead change by utilizing technology and available resources more efficiently. Additionally, enhancing parental involvement can be achieved by creating more open communication channels, such as forums or digital platforms that facilitate interaction between the school and families. Principals can also leverage the networks of driving schools and various local resources to overcome budget limitations by exploring potential collaborations with other institutions, both governmental and non-governmental. By implementing these solutions, it is hoped that principals will be able to overcome existing challenges and successfully realize student-centered learning in their schools.

Conclusion

This leadership competency workshop for school principals provided profound insights into the crucial role of principals in leading student-centered learning. The workshop participants, consisting of principals and supervisors, recognized the importance of competencies in managing educational change, creating policies that are responsive to students' needs, and efficiently managing human resources. With strong leadership skills, principals can create an environment that supports effective and inclusive learning processes. This not only impacts the quality of teaching but also the development of students' character and social skills.

This workshop also highlighted the importance of developing a student-oriented school ecosystem. Principals need to foster an inclusive school culture where students feel valued and are given the opportunity to develop according to their potential. Building such an ecosystem involves the active role of parents as partners in education, as well as creating open communication between the school and families. Although the challenges faced in creating this ecosystem are significant, such as limited resources and student diversity, the solutions proposed during the workshop, such as the use of technology and strengthening collaboration between schools and parents, can help address these challenges.

With enhanced competencies in leadership and educational management, it is hoped that principals will be able to bring about sustainable positive change in their schools. The implementation of student-centered learning principles, along with a supportive ecosystem, will improve the overall quality of education. Therefore, this workshop makes a significant contribution to the professional development of principals, which, in turn, will have a direct impact on improving educational outcomes in Indonesia.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this article. All research and activities related to this study were conducted with full transparency and integrity, ensuring that the findings and conclusions are unbiased and solely based on the data collected.

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