

The Leadership of the Principal at SD Negeri Bejen in Implementing the Independent Curriculum

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KEYWORDS	ABSTRACT
Keywords: Transformational Leadership; Principal Leadership; Independent Curriculum; Curriculum Implementation; Elementary School; Instructional Leadership. Conflict of Interest Statement: The author(s) declares that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest. Copyright © 2026 EDU. All rights reserved.	This study aims to examine the transformational leadership of the principal in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum at SD Negeri Bejen, Bejen District, Temanggung Regency, focusing on leadership strategies, roles, and efforts to overcome implementation challenges. This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach conducted from February to April 2026. The research site was selected purposively due to its implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observations, and documentation involving the principal, teachers, and educational staff. Informants were selected using purposive and snowball sampling techniques until data saturation was achieved. Data analysis followed the interactive model of Miles and Huberman, including data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing, with data validity ensured through source, technique, and time triangulation. The findings reveal that the principal implemented transformational leadership through six key aspects: curriculum planning, implementation support, academic supervision, communication and motivation, resource management, and continuous evaluation. The principal encouraged teacher involvement, strengthened professional learning communities, facilitated training programs, and optimized school resources to support curriculum implementation. However, challenges remained, particularly limited infrastructure and the suboptimal implementation of deep learning. This study implies that transformational leadership plays a crucial role in sustaining curriculum reform by fostering teacher competence, collaboration, and continuous improvement. Future studies are recommended to explore transformational leadership practices in diverse educational contexts.

Introduction

Changes in education policy in Indonesia through the implementation of the Independent Curriculum require a significant transformation in learning practices in schools (Hunaepi & Suharta, 2024). The Merdeka Curriculum is here as a response to the needs of 21st century education that emphasizes the development of competencies, creativity, and character of students (Lahiya et al., 2025). In this context, the learning process is no longer teacher-centered, but shifts to student-centered, so that students are expected to be more active, critical, and independent in learning (Bhardwaj et al., 2025).

The era of Society 5.0 is characterized by the integration of advanced technology in various aspects of life, including in the field of education, which demands a transformation in learning policies and practices (Yulianto et al., 2025). This development encourages educational institutions to be more adaptive to change, one of which is through the implementation of the Independent Curriculum which provides flexibility to schools in developing the curriculum in accordance with the needs of students and the local context.

The Merdeka Curriculum emphasizes strengthening character through the Pancasila Student Profile which includes the dimensions of faith and fear of God Almighty, global diversity, mutual cooperation, independence, critical reasoning, and creative (Ansori et al., 2023). In addition, this curriculum also

provides flexibility for teachers in designing learning that suits students' needs, interests, and abilities (Irwan & Aslan, 2024). This flexibility is an opportunity for teachers to innovate in creating more contextual and meaningful learning (Irsyad et al., 2024).

However, the successful implementation of the Independent Curriculum does not only depend on the readiness of teachers to understand and apply new learning concepts (Wildani et al., 2025). Another factor that is no less important is the role of the principal's leadership as the main driver of change in the education unit (Mikelsone et al., 2023). School principals have a great responsibility in ensuring that curriculum policies can be implemented effectively and sustainably (Matiala et al., 2023).

The principal has a strategic role as a learning leader who is in charge of planning, directing, fostering, and evaluating the entire learning process in the school (Ayumi & Nasution, 2025). As an instructional leader, the principal not only functions as an administrator, but also as a facilitator who is able to create a conducive learning environment for teachers and students (Dimara et al., 2025). This shows that the success of curriculum implementation is greatly influenced by the leadership quality of the principal (Rohmad et al., 2024).

Facing the dynamics of changes in education policy, an adaptive and visionary leadership style is needed (Groenewald et al., 2024). Administratively oriented leadership is no longer enough to address today's educational challenges (Mincu, 2022). Therefore, a leadership approach is needed that is able to inspire, motivate, and empower all school residents to actively participate in the change process (Yakob et al., 2025).

One of the relevant leadership approaches in this context is transformational leadership. Transformational leadership emphasizes the ability of leaders to build a shared vision, motivate, encourage innovation, and create positive change in the organization (Gupta, 2025). Transformational leaders also play a role in improving the commitment and performance of organizational members through a humanistic and participatory approach (Putra et al., 2023).

However, the implementation of the Independent Curriculum at the elementary school level still faces various challenges. One of the main challenges is the limited understanding of teachers to the concept of differentiated learning, which is one of the main characteristics of this curriculum. Many teachers still have difficulty identifying students' learning needs and designing learning accordingly.

In addition, the implementation of deep learning has not been running optimally. The learning process still tends to be oriented towards delivering material, rather than developing a deep conceptual understanding. This shows that more intensive efforts are still needed to improve the quality of learning in the classroom. Limited facilities and infrastructure are also obstacles in the implementation of the Independent Curriculum. Not all schools have adequate facilities to support innovative and technology-based learning. This condition requires creativity and innovation from schools, especially school principals, in optimizing available resources.

Facing these challenges, the role of the principal is very important, especially in providing assistance and training to teachers. School principals are also expected to be able to create a collaborative learning culture through the formation of learning communities and teacher professional forums. Through this collaboration, teachers can share experiences and good practices in implementing the Independent Curriculum.

Elementary School Negeri Bejen, Bejen District, Temanggung Regency is one of the schools that has implemented the Independent Curriculum. This school shows the dynamics of the principal's leadership in supporting the implementation of the curriculum, both in the form of internal policies, teacher development, and the development of learning programs. This becomes interesting to study further in the context of transformational leadership.

Based on this phenomenon, it is important to conduct research that examines how the transformational leadership of school principals is applied in the implementation of the Independent Curriculum. This research will also examine the strategies, roles, and efforts of school principals in overcoming various obstacles faced during the implementation process.

Therefore, this study is expected to provide an empirical picture of the transformational leadership practices of school principals in the implementation of the Independent Curriculum. The results of this research are expected not only to contribute to the development of educational management science,

but also to become a practical reference for other schools in improving the quality of leadership and successful curriculum implementation.

Research Design and Methodology

This study uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive type to understand in depth the transformational leadership of school principals in the implementation of the Independent Curriculum under natural conditions (Tisdell et al., 2025). The research was carried out at SD Negeri Bejen, Bejen District, Temanggung Regency in February-April 2026. The location was chosen purposively because it has implemented the Independent Curriculum and is relevant to the research focus.

The data source consists of primary and secondary data. Primary data is obtained from school principals, teachers, and education personnel, while secondary data comes from school documents such as work programs, supervision reports, and curriculum documents. Data collection techniques include in-depth interviews, observations, and documentation to obtain comprehensive data.

The determination of informants uses the purposive sampling technique followed by snowball sampling until data saturation is achieved. Data analysis was carried out using the Miles and Huberman interactive model through the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing in a sustainable manner.

The validity of the data is tested through triangulation of sources, techniques, and time, as well as member checks to ensure the suitability of the data with field conditions, so that the research results have a level of credibility and validity that can be accounted for.

Findings and Discussion

Findings

Based on the results of interviews with the principal and questionnaires given to teachers, it was found that the leadership of the principal at SD Negeri Bejen in implementing the Independent Curriculum was carried out through aspects of planning, implementation, coaching and supervision, communication and motivation, provision of facilities, as well as evaluation and continuous improvement.

1) Planning for the Implementation of the Independent Curriculum

The results of the interviews showed that the principal planned the implementation of the Independent Curriculum by compiling an agenda of activities that started from socialization to all school residents, involving teachers in the preparation of the school curriculum, to the implementation of learning in the classroom. The first step taken is to carry out socialization and involve teachers in the preparation of school programs through Learning Community (Kombel) activities, school program preparation, and In House Training (IHT).

The data was strengthened by the results of the teacher's questionnaire which stated that teachers were directly involved in the teacher council meeting to discuss the implementation of the Independent Curriculum and school programs before being designated as a school document. The teacher also said that the principal provided socialization about the implementation of the Independent Curriculum through Kombel activities, IHT on deep learning, and training on the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in learning.

The findings show that school principals implement participatory leadership by involving teachers in every planning process so that teachers have a shared understanding and responsibility for the implementation of the Independent Curriculum.

2) Leadership Implementation

At the implementation stage, the principal directs teachers to implement the Independent Curriculum through the effective use of BOS Performance (BOSkin) funds in the implementation of In House Training (IHT). The principal emphasized that the results of the training are not only understood by teachers, but also applied in real life in the learning process in the classroom.

The results of the teacher's questionnaire showed that it was in accordance with the principal's statement. The teacher said that SD Negeri Bejen is one of the schools receiving BOS Performance so

that various activities to improve teacher competence can be carried out. The teacher also stated that the results of IHT are expected to be applied in learning to students.

In addition, the principal provides support through Kombel, IHT activities, and facilitates teachers to participate in education and training organized by the Education Office. Physical Education teachers, for example, received special training on the Independent Curriculum from the Temanggung Regency Education Office. Teachers also admitted that the principal's direction and assistance helped them understand the concept of the Independent Curriculum better so that they were more confident in applying it in the classroom.

3) Coaching and Supervision

Coaching and supervision are carried out through academic supervision activities that are scheduled once every semester. The principal said that after the supervision was carried out, teachers were given input, direction, motivation, and were invited to discuss the results of supervision to improve the quality of learning.

The results of the teacher's questionnaire show that supervision has indeed been implemented, although according to some teachers the implementation is still not optimal. Teachers also stated that supervision is carried out once every semester and is always followed by the provision of input and direction from the principal as material for learning improvement.

The findings show that supervision at SD Negeri Bejen not only functions as an assessment activity, but also as a form of professional coaching for teachers to continue to improve the quality of learning according to the principles of the Independent Curriculum.

4) Communication and Motivation

In building communication, the principal provides opportunities for teachers to discuss both through formal meetings and personal communication. The open communication is used by teachers to convey various obstacles and needs during the implementation of the Independent Curriculum.

The results of the teacher's questionnaire corroborated the findings. The teacher stated that communication between the principal and the teacher was established in an active, open, and conducive manner. The principal also consistently motivates teachers, one of which is by encouraging teachers to participate in various trainings using the support of BOS Performance funds. This motivation makes teachers better prepared to face policy changes and improve their professional competence.

5) Facilities and Resources

In supporting the implementation of the Independent Curriculum, school principals provide various facilities and infrastructure, such as classrooms, internet access, digital learning media, libraries, laboratories, and school yards as learning facilities. The fulfillment of these needs is planned through the ARKAS application by utilizing School Operational Assistance (BOS) funds.

Based on the results of the questionnaire, teachers assessed that the facilities available in general had supported the implementation of the Independent Curriculum learning, although it was not fully optimal. The teacher said that there are still some classrooms that are not equipped with LCD projectors and limited sports equipment. This condition is one of the factors that affect learning optimization.

6) Evaluation and Improvement

The principal evaluates the implementation of the Independent Curriculum through supervision, discussions with teachers, and strengthening the Learning Community (Kombel) activities. The evaluation aims to find out the progress of curriculum implementation as well as find solutions to various obstacles faced by teachers.

The findings were supported by the results of the teacher's questionnaire which stated that the evaluation was carried out through strengthening Kombel activities to be more active as a forum for sharing experiences and problem solving. The teacher revealed that the main obstacle in the

implementation of the Independent Curriculum is the limitation of facilities and infrastructure and the implementation of deep learning in the classroom has not been optimal.

To overcome these obstacles, school principals provide solutions by encouraging teachers to participate in various education and training, both online and offline, as well as reactivating the Teacher Working Group (KKG) activities as a forum for sharing good practices between teachers. These efforts are expected to be able to improve teacher competence as well as improve the quality of the implementation of the Independent Curriculum at SD Negeri Bejen.

Based on the results of the principal's interviews and teacher questionnaires, it can be concluded that the principal's leadership in implementing the Independent Curriculum at SD Negeri Bejen has been carried out in a participatory and collaborative manner. The principal involves teachers from the planning stage, provides assistance through Kombel, IHT, supervision, and training, builds open communication, provides learning facilities according to the school's ability, and conducts periodic evaluations. Although there are still obstacles in the form of limited facilities and infrastructure and the implementation of deep learning has not been optimal, school principals continue to make various improvement efforts through improving teacher competence and strengthening the learning community. The correspondence between the results of the principal's interview and the teacher's questionnaire shows that the principal's leadership has an important role in supporting the successful implementation of the Independent Curriculum at Bejen State Elementary School.

Discussion

Based on the results of interviews with the principal and questionnaires given to teachers, it was found that the leadership of the principal at SD Negeri Bejen in implementing the Independent Curriculum was carried out through six main aspects, namely planning, implementation, coaching and supervision, communication and motivation, provision of facilities and resources, and continuous evaluation and improvement. These six aspects show that the principal has carried out his leadership function as an instructional leader oriented towards improving the quality of education.

1) Planning for the Implementation of the Independent Curriculum

The results of the study showed that school principals prepared plans for the implementation of the Independent Curriculum through socialization, teacher involvement in the preparation of school programs, Learning Community (Kombel) activities, and In House Training (IHT). The involvement of teachers in the preparation of school programs shows that the principal implements participatory leadership so that teachers have a sense of ownership of the program to be implemented.

The findings are in line with participatory leadership theory which explains that teacher involvement in decision-making will increase commitment, responsibility, and effectiveness of school program implementation. In the implementation of the Independent Curriculum, planning involving all school residents is an important factor because curriculum changes require the readiness of all teachers.

These findings are also in line with research (Lubis & Priyadi, 2022) which states that the implementation of the Independent Curriculum is carried out with careful planning, and its success is strongly supported by the role of school principals and teachers in driving change

2) Leadership Implementation

At the implementation stage, the principal optimizes the BOS Performance fund to support the improvement of teacher competence through IHT, deep learning training, training on the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI), and involving teachers in various trainings organized by the Education Office. Teachers admitted that the mentoring increased their understanding and confidence in carrying out learning according to the Independent Curriculum.

The findings show that school principals carry out their functions as instructional leaders that focus on improving teachers' competencies as the main implementers of the learning process.

The results of this study are supported by Mulyasa's research which confirms that school principals have a strategic role in the successful implementation of the curriculum through teacher empowerment, professional capacity building, and effective school management. These findings are also strengthened by various cutting-edge studies that show that school principals who provide

continuous training, mentoring, supervision, and build learning and IHT communities tend to produce a better level of readiness for the implementation of the Independent Curriculum (Radiana et al., 2026), (Mustoip et al., 2024), (Nadlir & Erfansyah, 2024).

3) Coaching and Supervision

The results of the study showed that the principal carried out academic supervision every semester and provided feedback in the form of direction, motivation, and discussion about the results of supervision. Although some teachers consider that its implementation still needs to be improved, supervision has provided benefits as a means of professional development for teachers.

This is in accordance with the concept of academic supervision which places supervision as a coaching process to improve the quality of learning, not just as an administrative assessment activity.

The findings of this study are supported by research that shows that academic supervision carried out in a structured, continuous manner, and accompanied by constructive feedback is able to improve teachers' pedagogic competence, the quality of learning in the classroom, and encourage continuous professional development of teachers (Shanghai, 2025); (Hasanah & Sururi, 2025); (Khoriah, 2026).

These findings are also in line with research that confirms that academic supervision does not only function as an administrative evaluation, but as a process of professional development through observation, reflection, follow-up discussions, and mentoring that helps teachers improve learning practices (Gulo & Handayani, 2026); (SHOFIAH & MACARIOLA, 2025); (Sulistiana et al., 2025).

In the context of the Independent Curriculum, these findings are reinforced by research showing that reflective and needs-based academic supervision is more effective in helping teachers implement differentiated learning, formative assessments, and student-centered learning strategies (Dewi & Rahman, 2025); (Rubiyanoro & Ardy Wiyani, 2026).

4) Communication and Motivation

Communication between principals and teachers takes place openly through meetings and informal communication. Teachers are given the opportunity to convey various obstacles in the implementation of the Independent Curriculum, while school principals consistently motivate teachers to participate in training and develop professional competencies.

The findings show that transformational leadership is characterized by the ability of school principals to build effective communication, provide motivation, and encourage teachers to continue to develop in the face of changes in education policies.

Research (Sari et al., 2025) also reinforcing these findings by showing that open and effective communication between principals and teachers is a key factor in reducing various obstacles in the implementation of the Independent Curriculum.

5) Provision of Facilities and Resources

The results of the study show that school principals have tried to provide various learning support facilities through BOS fund planning using the ARKAS application. The facilities available include classrooms, internet, libraries, laboratories, digital learning media, and school environments as learning resources. However, teachers still point out that there are limitations of LCD projectors in some classrooms and a lack of sports equipment.

The findings show that the principal has carried out a managerial function in the management of facilities and infrastructure, even though budget limitations have caused the fulfillment of facilities to not be carried out comprehensively.

Based on the results of the study (Puspaningrum, 2025), the research is in line with the results of the research, especially in the aspect of learning resource management, the use of digital media, and the role of school principals in supporting the implementation of the Independent Curriculum. The results of this study are in line with the research (Tumiyati et al., 2026) which shows that school principals have an important role in improving the quality of education through managerial functions, such as planning, organizing, mobilizing, and supervising (POAC). The findings strengthen the results of this study that school principals play a role as a driver of change in the implementation of the

Independent Curriculum through teacher empowerment, resource management, and collaborative culture development.

6) Continuous Evaluation and Improvement

The evaluation of the implementation of the Independent Curriculum is carried out through academic supervision, discussions with teachers, and strengthening the Learning Community (Kombel). The evaluation is used to identify various obstacles faced by teachers, such as limited facilities and infrastructure and the lack of optimal implementation of deep learning.

As a follow-up, the principal encouraged teachers to take part in various trainings, both online and offline, as well as reactivate the Teacher Working Group (KKG) as a forum for sharing good practices.

The findings show that school principals apply the principle of continuous improvement in school management. Evaluation does not stop at the assessment of results, but continues with the planning of improvement programs on an ongoing basis.

The results of this study are in line with the research (Sularno, 2025) which shows that the evaluation of the implementation of the Independent Curriculum is needed to identify various obstacles in its implementation, such as limited teachers' understanding, inadequate facilities and infrastructure, and lack of optimal collaboration between school residents. The research also confirms that the successful implementation of the Independent Curriculum is supported by school policies, improving human resource competencies, and a student-centered learning process. This strengthens the research findings that school principals evaluate through academic supervision, discussions with teachers, and strengthening the Learning Community as an effort to make continuous improvement.

Conclusion

Based on the results of the research, it can be concluded that the leadership of the principal at SD Negeri Bejen in implementing the Independent Curriculum has run effectively through aspects of planning, implementation, coaching and supervision, communication and motivation, provision of facilities, and continuous evaluation. The principal implements participatory leadership by involving teachers in every stage of the program, as well as demonstrating their role as learning leaders through various activities to improve teacher competence.

In addition, open communication and consistent motivation reflect transformational leadership that is able to improve teacher readiness and professionalism. Although there are still limitations in facilities and infrastructure and the implementation of deep learning is not optimal, school principals continue to make improvements through strengthening learning communities and continuous training. Thus, the leadership of the principal is a key factor in supporting the successful implementation of the Independent Curriculum at SD Negeri Bejen.

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