

# THE PRINCIPAL'S STRATEGY IN IMPROVING THE PROFESSIONALISM OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TEACHERS

\*<sup>1</sup>Nurul Affika Aulia,<sup>2</sup>Mohammad Sofwan Effendi,<sup>3</sup>Neti Karnati

<sup>1,2,3</sup>Master's Program in Educational Management, Faculty of Education  
Universitas Negeri Jakarta, Indonesia

Author's email:

<sup>1</sup>[nurulaffikaaulia0@gmail.com](mailto:nurulaffikaaulia0@gmail.com); <sup>2</sup>[mohammad.sofwan@unj.ac.id](mailto:mohammad.sofwan@unj.ac.id); <sup>3</sup>[neti.karnati@unj.ac.id](mailto:neti.karnati@unj.ac.id)

\*Corresponding author: [nurulaffikaaulia0@gmail.com](mailto:nurulaffikaaulia0@gmail.com)

**Abstract.** *The principal's function as a leader who can guide and support teachers has a significant impact on success in the field of education. The purpose of this study is to ascertain the leadership tactics used by the principal in an attempt to improve teacher professionalism. The vice principal and all of the teachers served as data sources for the descriptive qualitative methodology. Interviews and documentation were employed as data collection methods, and a continuous participatory approach that encompassed data collection, reduction, presentation, and conclusion drawing was used for data analysis. The results of the study show that the principal uses Kelompok Kerja Guru (KKG) which means Teacher Working Group activation, motivation, training, study visits, evaluation meetings, classroom supervision, enforcing sanctions and rewards, and adopting a participative leadership style as ways to improve teacher professionalism.*

**Keywords:** *Strategy; Principal Leadership; Teacher Professionalism*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Education is an important form of investment in the effort to build a nation's civilization. The progress of a country is greatly influenced by the extent to which its education system is currently developing, as education plays a significant role in shaping character and guiding humanity towards progress. Through education, humans can also face various challenges of the times. In addition, education serves as a means to shape the younger generation to be virtuous, well-charactered, capable of continuing the struggles of their predecessors, and possessing skills that are beneficial for themselves, society, and the nation. This view is in line with the Republic of Indonesia Law Number 20 of 2003 on the National Education System, particularly Article 1 paragraph (1), which states that education is a conscious and planned effort to create a learning atmosphere and learning process that enables students to actively develop their potential to possess religious spiritual strength, self-control, personality, intelligence, noble character, and skills needed by themselves, society, nation, and state (Usman, 2006: 9).

On a scale of 1 to 100, the average teacher competency score was 44.49, according to the findings of the Initial Competency Test in 2012, which was taken by 248,733 instructors from different educational levels (Jakariya, 2012). Additionally, data from the Ministry of Education and Culture about the 2015 Teacher Competency Test results also revealed unsatisfactory results, suggesting that further improvement is necessary to meet the expected standards of educational service in terms of teacher competency (Kurniawan, 2016). Given that teacher professionalism is essential to generating exceptional and high-caliber pupils as human resources, it is clear from this data that the degree of teacher professionalism is still comparatively low and needs considerable attention.

The function of the principal is one of the elements that contributes to the fulfillment of professional instructors. The principle has the power to implement measures aimed at enhancing the professionalism of teachers. According to Harapan (2017), a professional principal is a leader who is aware of the needs of the school they oversee. As a result, the demand for skilled instructors is one of the many needs that an administrator must

be able to address. In this situation, the administrator must create suitable plans to raise teacher's professionalism in order to improve the caliber of the school. The technique can be implemented by improving teacher competences, enforcing discipline, offering motivation, fostering positive working connections, increasing teacher commitment, attending to teachers' needs, and offering training, claims Mukhtar (2015). In order for the tactics put into practice to produce the best results, the principal must also be prudent and thorough when creating policies. The explanation leads one to the conclusion that the principal's proactive role in offering interventions through policies and calculated actions is crucial to the advancement of teacher professionalism. To put it another way, the principle has a significant role and a fantastic chance to support the enhancement of teacher quality.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### ***2.1 Principal's Strategy***

McLeod defines strategy as the art of carrying out a stratagem, which is a particular plan or method. The Greek word "strategy" refers to a course of action that consists of a series of actions to accomplish a goal or address an issue (Syah, 2011: 210). To put it another way, a strategy is the primary plan utilized to accomplish a goal, which is something that needs to be accomplished in an activity or organization. Hidayat & Martina (2022) define the principal's strategy as a plan that the principle develops and carries out to accomplish the objectives of the educational institution. This strategy reflects directed and systematic steps taken by the principal to manage, develop, and optimize the school's entire potential. Through effective strategies, the principal strives to ensure that every program and educational activity runs in accordance with the vision, mission, and goals set by the educational institution (Hidayat & Martina, 2022).

According to the opinions of the aforementioned experts, the principal's strategy is a focused and methodical plan that the principle develops and carries out in order to accomplish the objectives of the educational institution. To guarantee that educational activities are carried out in line with the stated vision and mission, this plan entails the administration, development, and optimization of all the school's capabilities. The principal also serves as the main driving force in empowering human resources at the school, particularly teachers and educational staff. Thus, the principal's strategy not only reflects administrative plans but also encompasses visionary leadership capable of mobilizing all elements of the school to achieve educational goals optimally.

### ***2.2 Teacher professionalism***

Teachers must be pedagogically, professionally, socially, and personally competent in order to be considered professional in the field of education. Along with imparting knowledge, a teacher's duties also include mentoring, character development, and setting an example for the students. In order to raise the caliber of teachers, suitable measures are required, such as ongoing training, the creation of pertinent curricula, and the improvement of teachers' welfare. As a result, educators may carry out their responsibilities to assist the attainment of educational objectives and to create a favorable learning environment as effectively as possible.

According to Rusman (2016: 19), Teacher Professionalism is the condition, direction of values, goals, and quality of a skill and authority in the field of education and learning related to a person's job that becomes their livelihood. In other words, it can be concluded that the definition of a Professional Teacher is a person who possesses 37 specific skills and expertise in the field of teaching, enabling them to perform their duties and functions as a teacher with maximum capability.

## **3. RESEARCH METHODS**

This study adopts a qualitative descriptive technique and is conducted at SDIT Bina Lestari in North Cikarang. The principal, the curriculum-charged vice principal, and the classroom teachers make up the research subjects. Document analyses and interviews

were used to gather data. The researcher just used an open interview guide during the interview process rather than any standardized tools. This gives researchers the freedom to explore information in depth and lets questions change based on the conversation's trajectory (snowball technique). The researchers employed Miles and Huberman's (1992) continuous interactive analysis approach for data analysis, which comprises the steps of data gathering, data reduction, data display, and conclusion drafting.

## **4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **4.1 Results**

It is known from the findings of observations and interviews that the principal has begun implementing measures to enhance the professionalism of teachers in recent years, particularly between the end of 2019 and 2021. Although it is accepted that some aspects have decreased, not dramatically, the bulk of teachers' increased competency attests to the school's development in teacher professionalism. the three-year increase in teacher professionalism.

Professional teachers play an important role in advancing the world of education and determining the quality of outstanding graduates under the guidance of the principal (Juliantoro, 2017; Mohamad, 2017). Thus, the strategies implemented by the principal in enhancing teachers' professionalism also contribute to shaping a quality generation of the nation. Based on the results of observations and interviews, it was found that the principal implemented several strategies in an effort to improve teacher professionalism, including: (1) activating Kelompok Kerja Guru (KKG) which means Teacher Working Groups at both the sub-district and school levels for similar subjects, (2) providing encouragement to teachers and creating space for them to innovate, be creative, and continuously develop their skills and abilities, (3) involving teachers in academic competency enhancement training, (4) including teachers in study tour activities, (5) holding teacher performance evaluation meetings, (6) conducting classroom supervision, (7) consistently applying a fair reward and punishment system, and (8) implementing a participatory leadership style as an approach to fostering teacher professionalism.

One of the efforts made by the principal to enhance teachers' professionalism is by activating the Teacher Working Group knowing as Kelompok Kerja Guru (KKG), which serves as a strategy to encourage independence and foster creativity among teachers. This aligns with the opinion of Palettei & Sulfemi (2019) who state that KKG functions as a scientific forum for the development of professional competencies of elementary school teachers, with objectives including: (a) helping to address the problems faced by teachers, (b) providing professional support within the school environment, (c) enhancing teachers' knowledge, understanding, skills, and professional attitudes, and (d) developing creative, active, and enjoyable learning management. This opinion indicates that if KKG is optimally implemented and well-supervised by the principal, it can become an effective means for teachers to continuously develop their knowledge and skills, ultimately encouraging the improvement of teachers' professionalism.

The principal also plays a role in enhancing teachers' professionalism by providing motivation and encouragement for them to continuously develop their competencies. This motivation is given regularly every month, especially when the teachers receive their salaries in the principal's office. In that moment, the principal delivers personal motivation and is willing to provide solutions if any problems arise that the teachers are facing. The principal is also always open and ready to receive teachers who want to consult whenever needed. In addition to individual approaches, the principal also delivers collective motivation through teacher evaluation meeting forums. Based on the findings, the principal also organized Tahsin Al Quran which means Quran recitation improvement activities as a form of training to enhance teachers' ability to read and understand the Quran.

In addition, the principal also organizes in-house training (IHT) programs that must be attended by all teachers. Not only internal training, but the principal also encourages

teachers' participation in various external training. These training activities are very important because they help teachers broaden their horizons, improve the quality of human resources, and encourage more effective performance as professional teachers. Training is one of the efforts to improve work effectiveness (Otuko, Chege, & Douglas, 2013; Admodiwirio, 2002). This is in line with Rahmawati's (2015) findings which state that training, teaching experience, and compensation have a significant impact on teacher professionalism. Based on the explanation, it can be concluded that training activities, seminars, and workshops have a positive impact on improving teachers' professionalism and supporting their performance enhancement. Through training, teachers also acquire new knowledge, positive attitudes, and the skills necessary to become professional educators. This is also supported by Ariyani's (2017) opinion, which explains that school principals can enhance teachers' professionalism by providing opportunities to participate in training, certification programs, further studies, collaborating with other institutions, and visiting other schools. From the explanation, it can be understood that benchmarking is one of the strategies to develop teacher professionalism, namely by visiting more advanced schools and studying good practices that can be applied in one's own school.

The principal and teachers must also cooperate on a monthly basis through evaluation meetings. Furthermore, at the conclusion of each class, a meeting known as a closing is organized to provide a place for discussion activities (Fitriyah & Santosa, 2020). The conference involves discussions about a variety of school activities, such as teaching and learning. Based on the above statement, it is possible to assume that if the evaluation meeting is handled effectively to share and solve any concerns among instructors, the teachers' professionalism would improve. Therefore, this appraisal meeting is crucial to schedule on a regular basis.

The principal, assisted by the head of the academic department, supervises teachers during the teaching and learning activities. This activity is conducted once a month. The curriculum deputy creates a supervision schedule and the teachers who will be supervised to prepare. In the supervision activities at SDIT Bina Lestari, it is not conducted to assess the teachers' shortcomings but to help develop their professionalism in teaching and find solutions if there are problems in the teaching and learning process (KBM). The implementation of supervision by the principal to the teachers during the learning process allows the teachers to receive feedback from the principal about their strengths and weaknesses, so they can improve in the future, such as feedback from the principal regarding classroom management, teaching methods, teaching discipline, and others. Academic supervision impacts teacher professionalism, such as teachers being able to understand and improve their shortcomings, enhance their teaching methods and techniques, manage their classrooms effectively, become more disciplined, deliver higher quality teaching, and be more confident in the classroom (Istianah, 2019). Based on the above description, it can be concluded that the implementation of school supervision is not to evaluate teachers but to enhance professionalism in teaching, as well as to provide solutions if there are obstacles in the learning process such as classroom management, teaching methods, teaching discipline, and others. In addition, if supervision is conducted in a programmed manner, it can enhance the professionalism of teachers.

To improve teacher professionalism and reduce boredom, the principal should implement punishment and reward systems, such as awarding prizes to teachers who can inspire their students in discipline by providing additional salaries for those who are disciplined and salary cuts for those who are not, rewarding teachers who can guide students in specific competitions, and rewarding teachers who win a competition. The principal also punishes teachers by deducting their honorariums based on their tardiness. This is consistent with the premise that the use of reward and punishment in education is a useful tool for enhancing student achievement, teacher performance, and teacher professionalism. The incentive technique responds to accomplishments and strong performance (Raihan, 2019). Punishment is one method for encouraging people

to follow the rules. Someone gets punished if they do not respond or behave as intended (Kompri, 2016).

#### **4.2 Discussion**

The findings of this study are consistent with the research conducted by Nikmah et al. (2017), which reveals that the principal is capable of fostering harmonious working relationships between teachers and school staff and can implement the principle of proportional incentives and sanctions. Another corroborating study, cited by Anshori (2020), found that implementing a reward and punishment program improved instructor discipline. Based on this, it is possible to conclude that the principal's strategy of improving teacher professionalism through the provision of rewards for teachers who demonstrate good work competence, as well as the imposition of sanctions for teachers whose performance falls short of standards, is a relatively effective approach to implement.

The principal at SDIT Bina Lestari implements a participatory leadership strategy to enhance teacher professionalism in various ways, including providing motivation and collaboratively seeking solutions through discussions when obstacles arise. In addition, the principal also provides guidance in terms of teacher administration, as well as striving to enhance the social competence of teachers through team-building activities and refreshing activities. The communication strategy implemented by the principal is open and fosters good relationships with the teachers. The principal also provides encouragement and ample opportunities for teachers to innovate, create, and continuously develop their abilities and skills with visionary thinking. Not only that, the principal also serves as a role model that teachers can emulate in various aspects. In the implementation of the teacher professionalism improvement program, both the principal and the teachers actively participate in the planning, execution, evaluation, and follow-up stages of the program.

The participative leadership style is a leadership style that emphasizes the leader's efforts to involve participation from subordinates in every decision-making process (Rohmat, 2010). The leadership of the school principal demonstrates a democratic attitude to encourage the advancement of teacher competency improvement. A similar point was made by Mulyasa (2006), that in participative leadership, leaders involve their subordinates in decision-making. Thus, subordinates feel more valued by their superiors because they are considered capable of playing a role in decision-making, and a good relationship will be maintained between leaders and subordinates (Permana & Karwanto, 2020). Characteristics of participative leadership style include: 1) two-way communication, 2) leaders listen to and respond to subordinates' problems, 3) leaders make decisions involving subordinates, 4) leaders encourage subordinates to utilize their operational capabilities, 5) encouraging subordinates to always participate and the maturity level of subordinates has progressed from medium to high (R. Soekarto, 1983). This leadership style encourages members or subordinates to increase their activity, openness, and awareness in addressing problems together.

#### **CONCLUSION**

The professionalism of teachers plays a significant role in improving the quality of education and defining the quality of graduates. The principal, as the leader of the educational unit, has a strategic responsibility in promoting teacher professionalism through various activities and techniques. Based on the findings and description of the research, it is possible to conclude that the school principal's strategies for improving teacher professionalism include forming Teacher Working Groups, motivating teachers, organizing training, conducting study visits, holding teacher evaluation meetings, classroom supervision, implementing a fair reward and punishment system, and implementing a participative leadership style. If the principal implements these tactics optimally, teachers' professionalism can be significantly improved.

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