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The Principal's Role in Improving Teacher Performance

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ABSTRACT

Objective: *This study aims to analyze the role of the principal in improving teacher performance at SDN 015 Mook Manaar Bulatn, West Kutai Regency, Indonesia, based on the Regulation of the Minister of Primary and Secondary Education of the Republic of Indonesia Number 7 of 2025 concerning the Assignment of Teachers as School Principals. It also identifies the supporting and inhibiting factors affecting the implementation of the principal's leadership role.* ***Method:*** *This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach. Data were collected through interviews, observations, and document analysis involving the principal, classroom teachers, and the school supervisor. Data were analyzed using the interactive model of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the principal's role in improving teacher performance.* ***Results:*** *The findings reveal that the principal effectively implemented the seven leadership roles of educator, manager, administrator, supervisor, leader, innovator, and motivator, contributing to improved teacher performance. Leadership and motivation were rated excellent, while the remaining dimensions were rated good. Teacher performance was supported by strong leadership commitment, collaboration, and stakeholder support but constrained by limited resources, supervision time, technological competence, and reward systems.* ***Novelty:*** *This study contributes to the literature by examining principal leadership through the perspective of Indonesia's newly enacted Ministerial Regulation No. 7 of 2025 and integrating it with Mulyasa's seven-dimensional leadership framework, providing updated empirical evidence on policy-based school leadership for improving teacher performance in primary education.*

INTRODUCTION

Improving the quality of basic education remains a strategic priority in many countries because it directly influences human capital development and national competitiveness [1]. Although governments have implemented various educational reforms, improving learning outcomes continues to be a major challenge, particularly in developing countries. In Indonesia, this challenge has become more evident following the COVID-19 pandemic, which intensified learning loss and widened disparities in educational quality across regions. The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2022 reported that Indonesia's average scores in reading (371), mathematics (379), and science (398) remained below the OECD average, indicating that the quality of classroom learning requires substantial improvement.

Recent educational reforms in Indonesia have therefore shifted their emphasis from administrative compliance toward improving learning quality through Kurikulum Merdeka, the National Assessment, and the Education Report Card system. These policies position teacher performance as one of the most important determinants of educational quality because teachers directly influence students' learning experiences and achievement. Teacher performance is no longer measured solely by the completeness

of administrative documents but also by the ability to implement differentiated instruction, provide meaningful feedback, integrate technology, and create an inclusive learning environment [2].

Since teacher performance is strongly influenced by the organizational environment, the role of school leadership has received increasing attention in educational research [3]. Effective principals are expected not only to manage school administration but also to function as instructional leaders who support teachers' professional development through academic supervision, mentoring, collaborative decision-making, and the creation of positive school cultures [4]–[6]. Contemporary educational leadership therefore emphasizes the principal's ability to improve teaching quality rather than merely maintaining organizational routines [4].

Previous studies consistently demonstrate that principal leadership positively affects teacher performance [7]. Leithwood, Harris, and Hopkins concluded that effective school leadership contributes significantly to teacher commitment, instructional quality [8], and student achievement. Similarly, Werdiningsih found that instructional and managerial leadership significantly enhance teachers' professional motivation and performance. Robbins and Judge further argued that effective leadership fosters organizational commitment, collaboration, and innovation, thereby creating conditions that encourage teachers to improve their instructional practices [9]. These findings collectively suggest that principal leadership is a key determinant of educational quality [10].

However, most previous studies have examined school leadership in relatively normal educational settings and under earlier regulatory frameworks. Limited attention has been given to how principals implement their leadership roles following the enactment of the Regulation of the Minister of Primary and Secondary Education of the Republic of Indonesia Number 7 of 2025 concerning the Assignment of Teachers as School Principals. This regulation fundamentally redefines principals' responsibilities by positioning them as full-time educational leaders responsible for managerial functions, instructional supervision, entrepreneurial development, and teacher capacity building. Consequently, empirical evidence regarding the implementation of this policy remains scarce.

This limitation becomes even more significant in remote and geographically disadvantaged areas. Schools located in rural regions frequently experience shortages of qualified teachers, inadequate educational facilities, limited technological infrastructure, and restricted access to professional development opportunities. In West Kutai Regency, East Kalimantan, for example, local government reports indicate shortages of more than 370 teachers and approximately 850 teachers who have not yet met the minimum academic qualification standards, particularly in remote communities. These conditions create substantial challenges for principals in fulfilling their expanded leadership responsibilities while simultaneously maintaining teacher performance and learning quality.

Despite increasing scholarly interest in instructional leadership, little is known about how principals exercise their multiple leadership roles within remote primary schools operating under the new regulatory framework. Existing studies rarely integrate Mulyasa's seven-dimensional principal leadership model—educator, manager, administrator, supervisor, leader, innovator, and motivator—with the implementation of Ministerial Regulation No. 7 of 2025. This represents an important research gap because understanding how policy reforms are translated into leadership practices in geographically constrained schools can provide valuable evidence for improving educational governance and leadership development in disadvantaged regions.

Therefore, this study aims to analyze the role of the principal in improving teacher performance at SDN 015 Mook Manaar Bulatn, West Kutai Regency, based on the implementation of Ministerial Regulation No. 7 of 2025. Specifically, this study addresses two research questions: (1) How does the principal perform leadership roles in improving teacher performance under the new regulatory framework? and (2) What factors support and hinder the principal's efforts to improve teacher performance in a remote primary school?

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a descriptive qualitative design to explore the principal's role in improving teacher performance through the implementation of the Regulation of the Minister of Primary and Secondary Education of the Republic of Indonesia Number 7 of 2025 concerning the Assignment of Teachers as School Principals [11]. The study was conducted at SDN 015 Mook Manaar Bulatn, West Kutai Regency, East Kalimantan, Indonesia, a remote public primary school selected because it represents the implementation of the new policy in a geographically disadvantaged area.

Participants were selected using purposive sampling and included the principal, classroom teachers, administrative staff, the school supervisor, and a representative of the school committee [12]. They were chosen based on their direct involvement in school leadership and teacher performance improvement.

The researcher served as the primary instrument, supported by semi-structured interviews, observations, and document analysis [13]. Data collection focused on the implementation of the principal's seven leadership roles proposed by Mulyasa: educator, manager, administrator, supervisor, leader, innovator, and motivator. School documents, including supervision reports, teacher performance assessments, and school work plans, were used to support and validate the findings [14], [15].

Data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña through data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. The data were coded according to Mulyasa's leadership dimensions and organized into themes related to principal leadership, teacher performance, and supporting and inhibiting factors [16].

To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, this study employed source and method triangulation, member checking, and prolonged engagement. These procedures

enhanced the credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability of the research findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Observation findings were used to complement and validate the interview data regarding the principal's role in improving teacher performance at SDN 015 Mook Manaar Bulatn, West Kutai Regency. The observations were guided by an observation checklist developed from Mulyasa's seven principal leadership dimensions: educator, manager, administrator, supervisor, leader, innovator, and motivator. Data were collected to examine the implementation of these leadership roles in daily school practices and to verify their consistency with the interview findings.

Table 1. Research observation results

No.	Indicator	Total Score	Maximum Score	Percentage	Category
1	Educator / Teacher Development	32	40	80.0%	Good
2	Manager / Resource Management	32	40	80.0%	Good
3	Administrator / Learning Administration	10	10	100.0%	Excellent
4	Supervisor / Academic Supervision	32	40	80.0%	Good
5	Leader / Leadership	37	40	92.5%	Excellent
6	Innovator / Instructional Innovation	30	40	75.0%	Good
7	Motivator / Teacher Motivation	35	40	87.5%	Excellent

Based on the observation results regarding the principal's role in improving teacher performance at SDN 015 Mook Manaar Bulatn, West Kutai Regency, it was found that the principal had performed seven key leadership roles: educator, manager, administrator, supervisor, leader, innovator, and motivator. The observations indicated that most leadership dimensions were rated as good to excellent. These findings support the interview results, demonstrating that the principal has actively enhanced teacher performance through professional development, resource management, strengthened administrative practices, academic supervision, effective leadership, instructional innovation, and teacher motivation.

Discussion

The observation findings indicate that the principal effectively fulfilled the seven leadership roles proposed by Mulyasa: educator, manager, administrator, supervisor, leader, innovator, and motivator. Overall, these roles were implemented at good to excellent levels, confirming the interview findings. The strongest dimensions were leadership, administration, and motivation, as reflected in effective communication, participatory decision-making, role modeling, a positive school climate, complete instructional administration, and continuous teacher encouragement.

Meanwhile, the educator, manager, and supervisor dimensions demonstrated good performance through teacher professional development, resource management, and academic supervision, although improvements are still needed in systematic coaching programs, supervision consistency, documentation, and follow-up evaluation. The innovator dimension received the lowest score despite remaining in the good category, indicating that instructional innovation has been initiated through varied teaching methods, literacy activities, and the use of simple learning media.

However, the integration of digital technology remains limited due to inadequate infrastructure and unequal technological competence among teachers. Overall, the findings suggest that the principal's leadership has contributed positively to improving teacher performance, particularly in instructional preparation, discipline, collaboration, and teaching motivation. Nevertheless, strengthening structured professional development, technology-based instructional innovation, systematic supervision, and formal teacher recognition mechanisms is necessary to achieve sustainable improvements in teacher performance.

CONCLUSION

Fundamental Finding : This study confirms that the principal plays a vital role in improving teacher performance through the effective implementation of Mulyasa's seven leadership dimensions. Strong leadership, academic supervision, and teacher motivation contributed to better discipline, instructional preparedness, professionalism, and teaching quality. Despite challenges related to infrastructure, technology, and limited resources, effective school leadership remains a key factor in enhancing teacher performance, particularly in remote primary schools implementing the Regulation of the Minister of Primary and Secondary Education No. 7 of 2025. **Implication** : The findings highlight the need to strengthen principals' instructional leadership, academic supervision, teacher professional development, and digital competencies, especially in remote schools. **Limitation** : This study was limited to a single public primary school and employed a qualitative approach, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings. **Future Research** : Future research should include multiple schools, apply mixed-methods or quantitative designs, and examine the long-term effects of principal leadership on teacher performance and student learning outcomes.

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