

Challenges of Instructional Leadership Related to Teacher Performance at Sabak Auh Junior High School

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Article Info	ABSTRACT
Keywords: <i>Instructional leadership;</i> <i>Teacher performance;</i> <i>Technology integration;</i> <i>School principal;</i> <i>Qualitative research;</i>	This study aims to analyze the challenges faced by the school principal in implementing instructional leadership to improve teacher performance at SMP Sabak Auh. Based on findings from the Education Report, although instructional leadership is categorized as good, the quality of teaching remains moderate. This indicates that despite the principal's active role in formulating a vision, managing learning programs, and creating a positive learning climate, the implementation has not fully impacted the quality of teaching. This research uses a qualitative approach with descriptive and phenomenological methods, collecting data through documentation, interviews, and observations. The findings show that the principal adopts a collaborative approach in setting learning goals, involving all teachers. However, the biggest challenge is the differing understanding among teachers regarding the implementation of these goals in the classroom, as well as the lack of technological skills among some teachers. The principal has implemented continuous training to address these challenges, but limited technological facilities and varying levels of teacher readiness remain obstacles. This study recommends strengthening the provision of technological facilities, enhancing training based on the practical needs of teachers, and increasing opportunities for teacher collaboration to improve teaching quality and achieve learning goals.
Informasi Artikel	ABSTRAK
Kata Kunci: <i>Kepemimpinan instruksional;</i> <i>Kinerja guru;</i> <i>Integrasi teknologi;</i> <i>Kepala sekolah;</i> <i>Penelitian kualitatif;</i>	Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis tantangan yang dihadapi kepala sekolah dalam melaksanakan kepemimpinan instruksional untuk meningkatkan mengajar guru di SMP Sabak Auh. Berdasarkan temuan Rapor Pendidikan, meskipun kepemimpinan instruksional telah masuk kategori baik, kualitas pembelajaran guru masih tergolong sedang. Hal ini menunjukkan bahwa meskipun kepala sekolah aktif merumuskan visi, mengelola program pembelajaran, dan menciptakan iklim belajar yang positif, implementasinya belum sepenuhnya berdampak pada kualitas mengajar guru. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan metode deskriptif dan fenomenologis, mengumpulkan data melalui dokumentasi, wawancara, dan observasi. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kepala sekolah menerapkan pendekatan kolaboratif dalam menetapkan tujuan pembelajaran yang melibatkan seluruh guru. Namun, tantangan terbesar yang dihadapi adalah perbedaan pemahaman antara guru mengenai implementasi tujuan tersebut di kelas, serta keterbatasan keterampilan teknologi di kalangan guru. Kepala sekolah telah melaksanakan pelatihan berkelanjutan untuk mengatasi tantangan ini, meskipun terbatasnya fasilitas teknologi dan perbedaan tingkat kesiapan guru menjadi kendala. Penelitian ini menyarankan untuk memperkuat penyediaan fasilitas teknologi, meningkatkan pelatihan yang berbasis kebutuhan praktis guru, dan memperbanyak kesempatan kolaborasi antar guru untuk meningkatkan kualitas pengajaran dan pencapaian tujuan pembelajaran.
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1. Introduction

Principal leadership plays a crucial role in creating a high-quality educational environment, with a primary focus on improving learning processes and student learning outcomes. As a leader, the principal is responsible not only for administrative duties but also for the school's academic success. In line with [1] theory, principal instructional leadership is understood as leadership that focuses directly on improving teaching and learning processes and student outcomes.

Leadership has a significant influence on the quality of learning in schools because principals are responsible for creating an environment that supports effective teaching and learning. One way principals influence learning quality is by establishing a clear school vision and direction. Empirical data obtained from the priority-indicator summary of a junior high school in Sabak Auh showed that the school's main performance issue remained learning quality, which was only in the moderate category (62.1). Priority aspects of the Education Report indicated several weaknesses in teachers' management of learning, including limited variation in instructional methods, suboptimal classroom management, weak habits of reflecting on teaching practice, and limited implementation of innovative practices. These conditions affected student achievement, particularly numeracy, which was also in the moderate category (66.67%). This indicates that teachers still face challenges in developing active, reflective, and student-outcome-oriented learning.

Observations and interviews conducted at a junior high school in Sabak Auh showed that the problem of learning quality involved several challenges that hindered optimal learning outcomes. In addition to limited variation in teaching methods, suboptimal classroom management, weak habits of reflecting on teaching practice, and limited innovation, other issues also affected learning quality. The use of technology in learning remained very limited, although technology can be an effective tool for increasing student engagement. Teachers also encountered difficulties in participating in training that they perceived as having no direct impact on their professional advancement or incentives, which reduced their interest in innovating in teaching. All of these factors directly affected student achievement and indicated that teachers still faced obstacles in developing active, reflective, and student-outcome-oriented learning.

On the other hand, data showed that the principal's instructional leadership (D.3) was already in the good category (50.81) and had improved compared with the previous year. The principal was regarded as visionary, consistently referring to the school's vision and mission, and making efforts to communicate policy directions to all school members. This leadership had encouraged a culture of teacher reflection and learning improvement. However, a contradictory phenomenon emerged: although instructional leadership was rated as good, teacher

learning quality remained moderate. In other words, strong principal leadership at the policy and vision levels had not yet been fully translated into daily teaching practices.

This phenomenon indicates an implementation gap. The principal had carried out the role of instructional leader, but teachers still experienced difficulty integrating leadership direction into innovative, reflective, and learning-outcome-oriented instruction. Programs and policies prepared by the principal had not yet been fully internalized at the classroom-practice level. Therefore, the principal challenge is not only to strengthen the leadership vision but also to ensure that instructional leadership genuinely improves teacher performance and the quality of student learning.

Given these conditions, research on the relationship between principal instructional leadership and teacher learning quality has high urgency. First, it is important for addressing the empirical gap between leadership that is rated as good and learning quality that remains moderate. Second, the results can make a practical contribution by helping principals formulate more applicable leadership strategies that genuinely affect teacher performance in the classroom. Third, the study is relevant to national education priorities that emphasize improving learning quality as the core of human-resource development. Thus, the study is academically valuable and has direct implications for improving educational quality in schools.

According to [2], teacher instructional quality is determined not only by mastery of subject matter (content knowledge) but also by pedagogical knowledge in presenting material according to students' needs, characteristics, and developmental levels. High-quality teaching is reflected when teachers can integrate both forms of knowledge into Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK), namely the ability to understand both what is taught and the most appropriate way to teach it. Through PCK, teachers do not merely transfer information; they can adapt strategies, methods, and learning examples that make material easier to understand, meaningful, and relevant for students. This theory emphasizes that the essence of teaching quality is the ability to connect content knowledge with pedagogical practice to produce effective learning that improves student achievement.

[3] stated that the dimensions of principal instructional leadership can be grouped into several main areas focused on improving learning quality and teacher professionalism. Instructional leadership includes the principal's ability to formulate a vision and learning goals, ensuring that all school activities are oriented toward improving student outcomes and developing teacher competence. Another aspect is the management of instructional programs, namely how principals design, monitor, and evaluate curricula and teaching-learning processes so that they align with student needs and national curriculum development. Academic supervision and teacher professional development are also important, as principals actively provide guidance, observation, and feedback on teachers' instructional practices to improve classroom

instructional quality. An equally important aspect is the creation of a positive and collaborative learning climate that fosters motivation, discipline, and responsibility in teachers' work environments. Thus, instructional leadership is not merely about controlling learning processes but also about becoming the main driver of a professional, reflective school culture oriented toward improved teacher performance.

Previous studies indicate that instructional leadership challenges are strongly related to teacher performance, particularly in schools with limited resources such as Sabak Auh Junior High School. [4] affirmed that principal instructional leadership has a positive and significant effect on teacher self-efficacy and performance: principals who actively provide direction, support, and academic supervision can enhance teachers' confidence and teaching performance. This finding is consistent with Andriadi and Sulistiyo (2024), who showed that transformational and instructional leadership styles jointly contribute to improved motivation, job satisfaction, and student achievement. Meanwhile, [5] and [6] found that although principals had attempted to implement instructional leadership strategies through teacher coaching, vision strengthening, and the creation of a positive learning climate, their effectiveness was constrained by limited resources, weak external collaboration, and unsystematic supervision. [7] likewise highlighted the need for more contextual and structured instructional leadership strategies to improve teacher motivation and professionalism sustainably. Taken together, these findings suggest that the main challenge of instructional leadership lies in principals' ability to manage limitations and build effective teacher-development systems so that performance can improve optimally in settings such as Sabak Auh Junior High School.

The choice of this research title was based on the importance of the principal's role as an instructional leader in improving learning quality. Although data indicate that instructional leadership in some schools is already categorized as good, teacher performance is still not optimal, as shown by limited variation in instructional methods, minimal reflection, and low implementation of innovation. This condition raises a critical question: why has instructional leadership that is rated as good not fully encouraged improvements in teacher performance? Therefore, this study is important for understanding the actual challenges faced by principals at Sabak Auh Junior High School in translating instructional leadership into improved teaching quality.

This study aimed to describe and analyze: (1) the forms of instructional-leadership implementation carried out by principals in the public junior high schools of Cluster 1, Siak Regency; (2) teachers' performance in implementing learning processes in those schools; and (3) the challenges faced by principals in applying instructional leadership to improve teacher performance. Accordingly, the study is titled "Challenges of Instructional Leadership Related to Teacher Performance at Sabak Auh Junior High School."

2. Research Methods

This study used a qualitative approach with a descriptive method to provide a systematic and factual description of the research object based on field data, without conducting in-depth statistical analysis or making broad generalizations. The qualitative approach was selected because the study aimed to understand the phenomenon in depth through the collection of non-numerical data, such as interviews, observations, documentation, and field notes. According to [8], qualitative research is conducted in natural settings, with the researcher serving as the primary instrument for data collection.

This research was conducted in eight public junior high schools in Cluster 1 of Siak Regency, Riau Province. The schools were purposively selected because their characteristics were relevant to the study focus, namely the gap between good instructional-leadership ratings and learning quality that remained in the moderate category. The sites were also selected because they had a sufficiently representative number of teachers, diverse teaching-experience backgrounds, and principals committed to improving learning quality. The research was carried out from October 2025 to February 2026 and included preparation, data collection, analysis, and report writing.

The data sources consisted of primary and secondary data. Primary data were obtained through in-depth interviews, direct observation, and field documentation involving principals, vice principals for curriculum, and teachers in the schools. Research ethics were carefully observed to ensure that all participants were involved voluntarily and without coercion. Before interviews began, the researcher explained the research objectives, procedures, and participants' rights, including the right to withdraw at any time without consequences. All participants were asked to provide written informed consent after fully understanding the study's purpose and procedures.

Data were analyzed using the interactive analysis model of [9], which includes three main stages: data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. At the first stage, data condensation was carried out by filtering and simplifying interview, observation, and documentation data so that they focused on information relevant to the research problem. At the second stage, data display involved presenting condensed findings in descriptive narratives, tables, or charts that described the relationship between the principal's instructional-leadership practices and teacher performance. The final stage involved drawing and verifying conclusions, in which the researcher developed tentative conclusions based on patterns and relationships found in the data and then verified them against additional data collected through follow-up interviews or repeated observations.

Data trustworthiness was maintained through credibility procedures designed to ensure that the data were dependable and reflected actual field conditions. To enhance credibility, the

researcher applied source and technique triangulation, prolonged observation, member checking, and peer discussion. These steps were undertaken to ensure that interpretations were objective and consistent with the realities of the public junior high schools in Cluster 1, Siak Regency.

By using a qualitative approach and descriptive method, this study is expected to provide an in-depth account of the challenges of principal instructional leadership and their impact on teacher performance, as well as a better understanding of the factors influencing learning quality in the public junior high schools of Cluster 1, Siak Regency.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Results

This study aimed to reveal the implementation of principal instructional leadership and the challenges encountered in developing teacher performance at Sabak Auh Junior High School. Based on interviews with the principal, teachers, and vice principal for curriculum, as well as relevant observation and documentation data, the study provides a comprehensive account of learning-management conditions at the school. Data triangulation was used to ensure the validity of findings by combining mutually supporting interview, observation, and documentation data. The findings are presented according to the three predetermined focuses: implementation of instructional leadership, challenges in developing teacher performance, and efforts to overcome those challenges.

3.1.1. Implementation of Instructional Leadership

The principal at Sabak Auh Junior High School adopted a highly collaborative approach in setting learning goals. These goals were established through open discussions involving all teachers. The principal ensured that the goals were not only relevant to the national curriculum but also responsive to the needs of the school's students. The principal held regular meetings with teachers to discuss and communicate learning goals. Through these meetings, all teachers had the opportunity to provide input and agree on the goals to be achieved. In this way, the principal sought to develop a sense of ownership of the learning goals to be implemented.

However, the main challenge faced by the principal in implementing instructional leadership was differences among teachers in understanding how to implement those learning goals in the classroom. The principal explained that although goals had been agreed upon collectively, some teachers were still confused about translating them into concrete steps in daily classroom activities. This indicates that, even when learning goals are clear, teachers do not all use the same approach to implementing them. Such differences may hinder the achievement of optimal learning outcomes. In practice, these differences were apparent in the ways teachers delivered lessons and managed classrooms. For example, some teachers used more conventional approaches, whereas others attempted to make greater use of technology.

Observations showed that, although learning goals were displayed on the board or included in lesson plans, some teachers still needed more time to ensure that students understood those goals deeply. Not all teachers felt comfortable with, or were accustomed to, communicating learning goals in more interactive and technology-based ways. Documentation further showed that although the principal had made various efforts to ensure clear and relevant learning goals, implementation did not always proceed smoothly because teachers differed in their understanding of and readiness to adopt new approaches.

The principal also supported teachers by serving as a resource person in the development of learning programs. This support included training related to technology use and teaching methods based on student-evaluation results. However, the greatest challenge was addressing differences in teachers' capacity to receive direction and guidance. Some teachers adapted more readily to new methods, whereas others were more comfortable with traditional methods and needed more time to adjust. These differences in readiness were a significant obstacle to creating consistency in teaching across the school.

The principal also sought to communicate the school's vision and mission transparently and openly through regular meetings involving teachers and staff. Despite intensive communication efforts, the greatest challenge was differing understandings of the school's vision and mission among teachers and staff. Some teachers still felt insufficiently involved in the communication process, which led to a lack of shared understanding about the direction the school sought to achieve.

3.1.2. Challenges in Developing Teacher Performance

The principal at Sabak Auh Junior High School stated that the greatest challenge in improving teacher performance was the limited technological skills of some teachers. Although training had been provided to strengthen teachers' technological skills, many teachers still found it difficult to integrate technology into their learning processes. This was caused by limited understanding and skills in using educational technology, as well as insufficient equipment to support technology use in classrooms. Budget limitations that prevented the provision of adequate technological equipment, such as computers, projectors, and stable internet access, were also a major obstacle to teacher-performance development.

The principal acknowledged that, despite efforts to improve teachers' technological skills through training, not all teachers were able to implement technology effectively in the classroom. Observations showed that teachers already familiar with technology were more confident and efficient in using digital tools for teaching. In contrast, teachers who were not familiar with technology showed discomfort and tended to avoid using it in class. This indicates an imbalance in technological skills among teachers at the school.

Another challenge was differing teacher understandings of the learning goals that had been jointly agreed upon. The principal

stated that although learning goals had been agreed upon through discussion, not all teachers could translate them into effective learning activities. Some teachers found it difficult to apply the methods expected by the principal, while others did not feel particularly burdened by those goals. This situation could create differences in teaching quality across classrooms.

Documentation indicated that although the principal sought to provide training and facilities that supported teacher-performance development, the gap between teachers who were skilled and unskilled in using technology remained a major obstacle. Education Report data showed that technology use in classroom learning was still not optimal despite the training and support that had been provided.

3.1.3. Efforts to Overcome Challenges in Teacher-Performance Development

To address the challenges in improving teacher performance, the principal took various measures, including providing continuous training based on individual teachers' needs. The principal ensured that the training focused not only on teaching but also on the technological skills needed in the classroom. Training was conducted regularly and covered a variety of topics, including educational technology use and project-based teaching strategies.

The vice principal for curriculum played an important role in supporting teacher-performance development. The vice principal collaborated with the principal to design and monitor curriculum implementation in accordance with established educational goals. In addition, the vice principal ensured that teachers received training suited to their needs. Observations showed that teachers who attended the training felt more confident and better prepared to implement technology-based learning.

However, despite significant progress in some aspects of teaching, the main challenge that remained was the school's limited facilities. Teachers who had attended training on technology use felt that existing facilities were inadequate for fully implementing technology-based learning. This indicates that, although training had been provided, limited facilities hindered the effective implementation of technology-based learning.

Documentation showed that, despite sufficient training and support, technology-based teaching remained limited in some classrooms. Teachers accustomed to using technology felt more confident, whereas others were constrained by the lack of adequate facilities.

Overall, although the principal at Sabak Auh Junior High School had made various efforts to improve teacher performance through instructional leadership, the main challenge remained limited facilities, particularly inadequate technological equipment. Although the training and support provided were substantial, implementation in the field was still constrained by limited facilities and different levels of teacher ability in using technology. Data triangulation involving interviews,

observations, and documentation showed that, despite some progress in technology-based teaching, classroom instruction had not yet been fully optimized. Therefore, improving teaching effectiveness at Sabak Auh Junior High School requires stronger technology facilities, more in-depth training, and sustained support for teachers to address these challenges and improve teaching quality comprehensively.

3.2. Discussion

The principal at Sabak Auh Junior High School sought to establish clear and collaborative learning goals by involving all teachers in formulating those goals. The goals were aligned with the national curriculum and the school's student needs. Through regular meetings, the principal communicated with teachers to ensure that the goals were understood and implemented effectively in classrooms. This is consistent with [10] concept of instructional leadership, which states that principals should involve all parties in learning planning in order to create goals that are more focused and implementable.

However, the greatest challenge faced by the principal was differing teacher understandings of how to implement learning goals in the classroom. Although the goals had been jointly agreed upon, some teachers found it difficult to translate them into concrete steps in classroom activities. This resulted in a mismatch between established goals and their implementation in the field. It reflects the findings of [11], who stated that clear communication of the vision and shared understanding of learning goals are essential to ensuring successful teaching.

In terms of guidance and support for teachers, the principal provided training relevant to teacher needs and mentoring in developing learning programs. Nevertheless, the greatest challenge was the variation in teachers' readiness and ability to receive and implement the support provided. Some teachers had difficulty using technology in their teaching even after receiving training. According to [12], to achieve optimal learning goals, principals must ensure that the support and training they provide are relevant and readily applicable for every teacher. This is related to teachers' readiness to adapt to the required educational technology.

Regarding communication of the school's vision and mission, the principal held regular meetings to ensure that all staff understood them well. However, despite these efforts, the challenge remained differences in understanding of the vision. This led to a lack of alignment in implementing the values the school sought to promote. As explained by [13], inconsistent communication about a school's vision and mission can hinder the attainment of shared goals within the school.

The greatest challenge in teacher-performance development at Sabak Auh Junior High School was limited technology. Although training had been provided to improve teachers' technological skills, many teachers still found it difficult to integrate technology into learning. Limited technological equipment and unstable internet connections were significant

barriers to maximizing technology use in teaching. This is consistent with [14], who stated that successful technology integration in education depends heavily on adequate access to technology and support from the school.

In addition to limited facilities, the principal noted differences among teachers in their understanding of learning goals. Although goals had been agreed through discussion, some teachers still found it difficult to align their teaching methods with those goals. who emphasized that differences in teachers' understanding and teaching approaches can lead to inconsistent instruction and reduce learning quality.

Observations showed that although some teachers were accustomed to using technology, others were more comfortable with traditional methods and felt burdened by the expected changes. This reflects [15] finding that teachers' capacity and readiness to adapt to technology depend greatly on individual digital competence and the support provided by the principal.

To overcome these challenges, the principal at Sabak Auh Junior High School implemented various strategic efforts, such as providing training based on individual teacher needs. This training focused not only on improving teaching skills but also on using technology to support learning. The principal also encouraged teachers to collaborate in teaching teams so that they could share experience and strategies for addressing existing challenges. [16] stated that collaboration among teachers is key to improving teaching performance and strengthening shared understanding of learning goals.

However, despite these steps, the greatest remaining challenge was limited facilities. Teachers who had attended training felt more confident in teaching with technology, but they were constrained by insufficient equipment. Documentation showed that although training and support had been provided, technology-based teaching in classrooms remained limited in most classes. who stated that teacher training must be accompanied by adequate facilities in order to achieve effective technology implementation.

In addition, the vice principal for curriculum played an important role in supporting teacher-performance development by providing more intensive training. The vice principal focused on developing a curriculum suited to teacher needs and ensuring that training remained relevant to contemporary developments. The facilitated training programs included educational technology use, curriculum development, and project-based learning methods. [17] showed that appropriate technology-based training can improve teachers' digital competence and overall teaching quality.

4. Conclusion

Based on the findings, it can be concluded that the principal's instructional leadership at Sabak Auh Junior High School had functioned well, although challenges in consistently implementing learning goals and using technology remained the

main obstacles. The principal had sought to provide support through training and teacher collaboration, but limited facilities and the readiness of some teachers to adopt technology hindered optimal implementation. Therefore, the school is advised to strengthen the provision of adequate technological facilities, offer more in-depth training tailored to teachers' practical needs, and create more opportunities for teacher collaboration. In addition, continuous evaluation of training and technology implementation is important to ensure that every teacher can implement technology-based learning effectively, improve teaching quality, and achieve the established learning goals.

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