

The Principal's Role as a Change Agent in Building a Culture of Teacher Compliance with School Policies

¹⁾ Sisra Yosi, ²⁾ Mada Sutapa

^{1,2)} Master of Education Management, Faculty of Education, Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta

Email: sisrayosi.2025@student.uny.ac.id

Correspondence Author: sisrayosi.2025@student.uny.ac.id

Article Info	ABSTRACT
Keywords: principal; change agent; compliance culture; school policy; teachers.	This study aims to describe the principal's role as a change agent, identify supporting and inhibiting factors, and analyze the principal's strategies in strengthening teachers' compliance with school policies. The research employs a qualitative approach and was conducted at a public junior high school in Pelangiran Subdistrict, Indragiri Hilir Regency. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation, and analyzed using Miles and Huberman's interactive model, with data validity ensured through source and technique triangulation. The results show that the principal acts as a change agent through role modeling, coaching, supervision, participatory communication, and teacher empowerment. Supporting factors include teacher commitment, a family-like work climate, simple reward systems, and the use of digital technology, while inhibiting factors comprise resistance to change, heavy workload, limited technological competence, and inconsistent rule enforcement. The strategies employed include strengthening role modeling, continuous coaching and supervision, proportional reward and punishment, optimization of information systems, and reinforcing a culture of mutual reminder. This study concludes that effective principal leadership can shift teacher compliance from mere formality toward compliance based on awareness and collective professional responsibility.
Informasi Artikel	ABSTRAK
Kata Kunci: kepala sekolah; agen perubahan; budaya kepatuhan; kebijakan sekolah; guru.	Penelitian ini bertujuan mendeskripsikan peran kepala sekolah sebagai agen perubahan, mengidentifikasi faktor pendukung dan penghambat, serta menganalisis strategi kepala sekolah dalam meningkatkan budaya kepatuhan guru terhadap kebijakan. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan lokasi di salah satu SMP Negeri Kecamatan Pelangiran, Kabupaten Indragiri Hilir. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam, observasi, dan dokumentasi, kemudian dianalisis menggunakan model interaktif Miles dan Huberman, dengan uji keabsahan data melalui triangulasi sumber dan teknik. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kepala sekolah berperan sebagai agen perubahan melalui keteladanan, pembinaan, supervisi, komunikasi partisipatif, dan pemberdayaan guru. Faktor pendukung meliputi komitmen guru, iklim kerja kekeluargaan, sistem penghargaan sederhana, dan pemanfaatan teknologi digital, sedangkan faktor penghambat mencakup resistensi terhadap perubahan, beban kerja tinggi, keterbatasan kompetensi teknologi, dan ketidakonsistenan penegakan aturan. Strategi yang ditempuh meliputi penguatan keteladanan, pembinaan dan supervisi berkelanjutan, penerapan reward dan punishment yang proporsional, optimalisasi sistem informasi, serta penguatan budaya saling mengingatkan. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa kepemimpinan kepala sekolah yang efektif mampu menggeser kepatuhan guru dari sekadar formalitas menuju kepatuhan yang berbasis kesadaran dan tanggung jawab profesional kolektif.
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✉ **Corresponding Author:** (1) Sisra Yosi, (2) Department of Education Management, (3) Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta, (4) Yogyakarta, Indonesia, (5) Email: sisrayosi.2025@student.uny.ac.id

1. Introduction

Education is a vital instrument for developing high-quality human resources. The success of educational provision is inseparable from the role of the principal as a leader who can manage, direct, and develop the potential of all school components, including teachers. A principal does not merely function as an administrative manager but also as a change agent who actively creates a conducive, innovative, and adaptive school climate in response to contemporary developments.

The principal's leadership as a change agent is grounded in the capacity to transform organizational culture, values, and the behavior of school members in a more positive direction. According to [1], principals in the digital era are expected not only to focus on administrative matters but also to serve as drivers of learning innovation, character development, and adaptation to advances in educational technology. Principals must foster collective commitment, provide role models, and build an organizational culture that is disciplined and professional. This indicates that leadership is not merely managerial but also transformational.

One important element in creating an effective school is a culture of teacher compliance with school policies. School policies are designed to promote order, professionalism, and improvements in learning quality. In practice, however, teacher compliance with such policies does not always meet expectations. Non-compliance still occurs, including late arrival to class, irregular completion of learning administration, and resistance to school-led innovations. [2] found that low teacher compliance in carrying out duties is often caused by inadequate coaching, supervision, and principal role modeling in enforcing a culture of discipline. This finding is reinforced, who reported that weak supervision and limited effective communication between principals and teachers contribute to low teacher discipline.

Initial observations conducted by the researcher at a public junior high school in Pelangiran Subdistrict indicated that some teachers had not consistently complied with school policies. The identified concerns included late arrival at the start of teaching hours, delays in submitting learning documents such as teaching modules, and limited active participation in innovative school activities, including workshops on the digitalization of learning. Some teachers were also found to be insufficiently disciplined in conducting classroom supervision and submitting assessment-administration reports on time. These conditions indicate a gap between policies established by the school and their actual implementation in practice.

Conversely, some teachers demonstrated high compliance with school policies by arriving on time, preparing complete learning materials, and actively participating in various school innovation programs, including the use of digital learning platforms. These differing levels of compliance create organizational dynamics within the school: some teachers regard policies as formal rules that must be followed, whereas others still show resistance. This situation suggests that a culture of compliance with school policies has not yet developed evenly; therefore, more effective principal leadership strategies are

required through coaching, continuous supervision, role modeling, and the proportional application of rewards and sanctions.

This condition confirms that a culture of compliance with school policies has not been established uniformly, requiring a more strategic and effective principal leadership role. The principal is not only an administrative manager but also a change agent who can cultivate awareness, develop a culture of discipline, and internalize professional values among teachers. In other words, the principal must act as a figure who positively influences teacher behavior through role modeling, motivation, coaching, and empowerment. As a change agent, the principal bears substantial responsibility for building this culture of compliance.

Initial observations at a public junior high school in Pelangiran Subdistrict revealed not only differences in teachers' levels of compliance but also variations in principal leadership practices. The principal had sought to build a culture of discipline by establishing attendance rules, requiring the preparation of learning documents, and encouraging the use of digital platforms in teaching and learning activities. However, these leadership practices had not yet been fully effective. This was evident in weak routine supervision, insufficiently intensive communication during coaching, and inconsistent role modeling in matters of discipline.

On the other hand, positive aspects of the principal's leadership were evident in efforts to promote learning innovation through internal workshops and teacher collaboration. However, these initiatives had not been followed equally by all teachers because some still showed resistance. This finding indicates that the principal's role as a change agent had been enacted, but had not yet fully fostered a collective and sustainable culture of compliance.

The leadership approach adopted by a principal strongly determines the level of teacher compliance. When leadership is participatory and capable of cultivating a sense of ownership, a culture of compliance can grow internally rather than merely as a result of coercion. Conversely, when the principal's role is not performed optimally, a culture of compliance will be difficult to realize.

The differing levels of teacher compliance with school policies observed at a public junior high school in Pelangiran Subdistrict, together with findings from previous studies, show that teacher compliance remains a fundamental issue in school management. On the one hand, some teachers consistently perform their duties in accordance with established rules; on the other, many still demonstrate non-compliance in punctuality, preparation of learning documents, and involvement in school innovation programs. This condition indicates that a culture of compliance with school policies has not yet developed evenly.

From a theoretical perspective, a number of studies emphasize the importance of principal leadership. [3], through the transformational leadership model, highlight four key indicators that can encourage changes in teacher behavior. Meanwhile, [4] theory of organizational change explains that a culture of compliance can only be created when principals consistently

move through the stages of unfreezing, changing, and refreezing. This is consistent with [5], who emphasize the importance of instructional leadership in improving learning quality.

The novelty of this study lies in its focus on the principal not merely as an administrative manager but as a change agent who helps build a culture of teacher compliance with school policies. Several studies show that principals have a strategic role as change agents in improving educational quality and fostering positive school cultures. [6] found that principals play an important role in implementing the Independent Curriculum through teacher empowerment and continuous mentoring to strengthen pedagogical understanding. [7] affirmed that change-oriented principal leadership can create a positive and inclusive school culture. [8] likewise demonstrated that principals act as drivers of innovation and positive change through effective communication, role modeling, and collaboration with school members. Meanwhile, [9] highlighted the role of principals in building a disciplined, resilient, and collaborative teacher work culture through continuous supervision and motivation.

Furthermore, [10] reported that, in the context of the Sekolah Penggerak program, principals as change agents successfully mobilized learning transformation by instilling reflective and participatory values among teachers. [11] emphasized that visionary principal leadership can improve educational quality through a clear vision, adaptability to change, and commitment to school innovation. Similarly, [12] found that visionary leadership is positively associated with teacher readiness to face the challenges of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, particularly in digital literacy and technology-based learning. Overall, these studies affirm that the success of principals as change agents depends greatly on their ability to motivate, inspire, and empower all school members to adapt to contemporary demands and dynamic educational policies.

Unlike previous studies that have largely discussed principal leadership in the context of academic supervision or general teacher performance improvement, this study directly links leadership, organizational culture, and teacher compliance. It also offers novelty by highlighting the gap between regulations and theory on the one hand and field realities on the other: although regulations clearly emphasize the principal's role as a change agent, a culture of compliance has not yet been established evenly in schools. Through a qualitative approach and a local context in junior high schools in Pelangiran Subdistrict, this study is expected to provide a deeper understanding of principal strategies for cultivating a collective and sustainable culture of compliance.

Based on the foregoing theoretical discussion and empirical findings, examining the principal's role as a change agent in building a culture of teacher compliance with school policies is relevant. This study used a qualitative approach because it focuses on an in-depth understanding of principals' experiences, perceptions, and strategies in building teacher compliance. The study aimed to identify the supporting and inhibiting factors faced by principals in developing a culture of teacher compliance with school policies and to analyze principal strategies for strengthening such compliance.

2. Methods

This study adopted a qualitative approach. A qualitative approach was selected because the study sought to gain an in-depth understanding of social phenomena occurring in the field rather than merely measure relationships among variables. The researcher examined the processes, values, and interactions that arise in educational settings, particularly principal leadership in creating a culture that supports teacher compliance with existing policies.

The study was conducted at a public junior high school in Pelangiran Subdistrict, Indragiri Hilir Regency, Riau Province, selected purposively. The research took place from August to November 2025 and included preparation, data collection, and data analysis. The study used primary and secondary data sources. Primary data were collected directly through in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation involving the principal, teachers, and education personnel involved in implementing school policies. Through interviews and observation, the researcher explored informants' experiences and perceptions regarding the principal's role in building a culture of teacher compliance. Secondary data were obtained from official school documents, including school profiles, internal policies, supervision reports, meeting minutes, and relevant educational regulations. These sources enriched and strengthened the findings derived from the primary data.

To obtain in-depth and valid data, the researcher used three main data-collection techniques: in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation. Interviews were conducted directly with the principal, teachers, and education personnel to explore information on principal strategies for building a culture of compliance. Observation was used to examine the behavior of principals and teachers in implementing school policies, as well as their interactions. Documentation was also used to review materials that could provide additional information, such as supervision reports and meeting minutes. Data trustworthiness was ensured through four criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility was maintained through source and technique triangulation by comparing interview, observation, and documentation findings. Transferability was supported by providing a detailed description of the research context so that the findings may be considered for similar settings. Dependability was achieved by systematically documenting every research stage so that the process could be audited by others. Confirmability was maintained by ensuring that the data originated from informants rather than researcher bias, supported by retaining all relevant field evidence.

The data-analysis process followed the interactive model proposed by Miles and Huberman, which consists of three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification. During data reduction, the researcher selected and simplified interview, observation, and documentation data, focusing on information relevant to the study objectives.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Results

This study aimed to describe: (1) the principal's role as a change agent in building a culture of teacher compliance with school policies; (2) the supporting and inhibiting factors encountered by principals in building that culture; and (3) principal strategies for strengthening teacher compliance with school policies. Data were obtained through in-depth interviews with the principal, teachers, and education personnel, and were reinforced by observation and documentation.

3.1.1. The Principal's Role as a Change Agent

The findings show that the principal played a central role as a change agent in building a culture of compliance at the school. This role was evident through the role modeling, coaching, supervision, communication, and empowerment carried out in daily practice. The principal consistently arrived on time, observed the dress code, completed administrative work according to schedule, and participated in official school activities. Teachers perceived these behaviors as a "real example," making them reluctant to behave in a less disciplined manner. Thus, the principal's role modeling became the starting point for developing a culture of compliance because teachers saw that policies were not merely demanded but genuinely practiced by the leader.

In addition, the principal regularly provided coaching through meetings, briefings, and informal gatherings that reinforced the importance of compliance with school policies. Classroom supervision was scheduled and was always followed by one-to-one discussion and guidance for improvement. Teachers considered this supervision pattern helpful because it clarified the standards they were expected to meet while making them feel supported in the improvement process. School policies were not communicated unilaterally; they were also discussed in meetings, giving teachers space to express opinions and suggestions. This active involvement fostered a sense of ownership of policies and strengthened commitment to collective decisions. Empowerment was also carried out by involving teachers and education personnel in curriculum teams, activity committees, and other school programs. Such responsibilities cultivated trust and encouraged them to comply more consistently with procedures and policies. Overall, the principal's role as a change agent was reflected in the combined use of role modeling, coaching, supervision, participatory communication, and empowerment, which together strengthened the culture of compliance in the school environment.

3.1.2. Supporting and Inhibiting Factors in Building a Culture of Compliance

The findings indicate that the principal's efforts to build a culture of teacher compliance with school policies cannot be separated from the simultaneous presence of supporting and inhibiting factors. On the supporting side, the commitment of most teachers to educational quality and discipline constituted important capital that made it easier for the principal to invite them to cooperate in implementing policies. Teachers were generally aware that school policies were intended to support

smooth learning processes and sound school governance, and they were therefore inclined to follow the principal's directions. A warm, family-like work climate also reinforced these conditions. In such an atmosphere, coaching and corrective reminders could be delivered persuasively and were more readily accepted without excessive resistance. In addition, a simple recognition system, such as acknowledging disciplined teachers during meetings, proved able to increase teachers' motivation to remain compliant. The use of digital technology, for example through online attendance records and communication groups, was also a supporting factor because it made monitoring attendance, conveying information, and reporting tasks more structured and transparent, enabling more effective monitoring of policy implementation.

Conversely, the principal faced several inhibiting factors in efforts to establish a culture of compliance. One of the main obstacles was resistance among some teachers, especially those with long teaching experience, to new policies that they perceived as adding to their workload. Policy changes, particularly those requiring stricter administration and the use of technology, were often seen as burdensome. Heavy teaching and administrative workloads made it difficult for teachers to meet all requirements consistently, even when they intended to comply. Limited technological skills among some teachers, combined with infrastructure constraints such as unstable internet connections or limited devices, also hindered the implementation of digitally based policies. In addition, past experiences of inconsistent rule enforcement shaped some teachers' perceptions, leading them to view policy violations as still tolerable. The combination of these obstacles required the principal to take a more patient, gradual, and adaptive approach to instilling a culture of compliance.

3.1.3. Principal Strategies for Strengthening Teacher Compliance with Policies

In response to these supporting and inhibiting factors, the principal developed several strategies to strengthen teachers' compliance with school policies. One key strategy was to combine role modeling with clear communication. The principal emphasized that the leader must first comply with policies before expecting teachers to do the same. Each policy was communicated not merely as a rule to be followed but also with an explanation of its purpose, benefits, and consequences so that teachers understood its context rather than simply memorizing its provisions. In this way, compliance was expected to arise from understanding and awareness rather than solely from fear of sanctions.

Another prominent strategy was continuous coaching and supervision. Supervision was not used only as a control mechanism but also as a medium for reflection and improvement. Supervision results were always followed by guidance and discussions of solutions, so teachers felt valued and supported in improving their performance and compliance with established standards. At the same time, the principal applied a proportional system of rewards and sanctions. Teachers who demonstrated discipline and consistency in complying with policies received recognition, whether through verbal appreciation, trust to

undertake particular responsibilities, or acknowledgment in official forums. Conversely, repeated violations were addressed through gradual sanctions in accordance with procedures. Consistent application of rewards and sanctions reinforced the message that school policies were binding and needed to be followed seriously by all school members.

The use of technology and the reinforcement of a culture of mutual reminders also formed an important part of the principal's strategy. Technology was used to support attendance, reporting, and communication so that policy implementation became more measurable and well documented. Data recorded through digital systems made it easier for the principal to monitor implementation and make information-based decisions. At the same time, a culture of mutual reminders began to grow among teachers and between teachers and education personnel regarding administrative obligations and discipline. School members no longer waited only for a reprimand from the principal; they actively reminded one another when delays or omissions occurred. The principal also encouraged empowerment and collaboration by providing opportunities for teachers and education personnel to participate actively in program planning and implementation. This involvement allowed compliance with policies to emerge from shared commitment rather than merely top-down instruction, thereby making the culture of compliance stronger and more sustainable.

3.2. Discussion

3.2.1. Principals as Change Agents and Builders of a Culture of Compliance

The finding that the principal is the primary figure in building a culture of compliance is consistent with the concept of the principal as a change agent, which emphasizes a school leader's ability to initiate, manage, and sustain change in an educational institution. [13] showed that principals are expected to act as change agents who can respond to the complexity of new school demands and mobilize school members toward more effective practices. This finding is reinforced by [14], who explained that principal management practices directly contribute to improved teacher performance and work culture in vocational schools. In the Indonesian context, emphasized that principal leadership plays a critical role in building an effective school culture, including discipline, learning climate, and the internalization of shared values.

More specifically, the results of this study reinforce recent research on principal leadership in fostering a culture of discipline and order in schools. [15] also showed that a conducive and well-managed school culture, characterized by open communication, routine coaching, and consistent rule enforcement, directly strengthens teacher and student discipline. These findings are consistent with the present study, which shows that the principal's role modeling, humane firmness, and consistent communication form the foundation for developing teachers' compliant behavior toward school policies.

The principal's role modeling observed in this study is also consistent with recent studies of transformational leadership. [16], in *Enrichment: Journal of Management*, found that

transformational principal leadership significantly affects teachers' organizational commitment, making them more prepared to align themselves with the school's vision and policies. Similar findings were reported by [17], who found a positive relationship between transformational principal leadership and teacher commitment and performance. Another study by [18] affirmed that transformational principal leadership contributes to the development of a strong learning culture in schools. Thus, the principal's role in this study, expressed through role modeling, coaching, supervision, participatory communication, and empowerment, can be understood as a combination of instructional and transformational leadership that provides the foundation for a culture of teacher compliance with school policies.

3.2.2. Supporting and Inhibiting Factors from the Perspective of School Culture and Work Discipline

The finding that a positive work climate, a sense of family, and recognition systems are important supporting factors is consistent with studies emphasizing the role of school culture in shaping the behavior of school members. [18] also found that school culture, together with principal leadership, teacher commitment, and work discipline, significantly affects vocational-school teacher performance. Similarly, [15] emphasized that a culture of discipline reinforced through habituation, role modeling, and collective coaching can improve school members' compliance with regulations. These findings correspond with the present study, which shows that teacher commitment, a family-like work climate, and simple recognition from the principal are important supporting factors in building a culture of policy compliance.

Conversely, the inhibiting factors identified in this study, including resistance to change, heavy workload, and limited technological capacity, are consistent with research on the challenges of principal leadership in the context of curriculum change and the digitalization of educational management. digital-based management in schools offers benefits for efficiency and accountability but also presents challenges in the form of teacher resistance, limited infrastructure, and digital competency gaps. digital transformation in educational management is often constrained by human-resource readiness and limited network access, requiring principals to design gradual and systematic transition strategies. [19] likewise emphasized that the use of digital technology in school management is effective only when accompanied by improved teacher digital competence and adequate information-system support. The present findings, which show that some teachers object to administrative workloads and struggle to use technology, are consistent with this evidence.

3.2.3. Principal Strategies: Role Modeling, Supervision, Rewards and Sanctions, and Technology Use

Principal strategies that combine role modeling, clear communication, continuous coaching, and the application of rewards and sanctions align with the concept of instructional leadership, which positions the principal as the primary director of learning processes and the quality assurer of policy implementation. [10] also found that instructional leadership,

together with work achievement and compensation, contributes to elementary school teachers' work motivation, which in turn strengthens their performance and compliance with assigned duties. In the context of a culture of discipline, [20] explained that principal strategies emphasizing role modeling, values communication, and continuous coaching are effective in collectively building a culture of discipline in schools. These findings align with the strategies observed in this study, in which the principal not only demands compliance but also provides examples, direction, and support throughout the change process.

The proportional application of rewards and sanctions in this study is also consistent with research on the implementation of school rules and sanction systems. [7] emphasized that clear and consistent rule enforcement, accompanied by constructive coaching, can cultivate long-term disciplinary awareness rather than temporary compliance driven by fear of punishment. Other studies on discipline culture and student order also indicate that combining recognition for positive behavior with gradual sanctions for violations can create an orderly and conducive school climate. In this study, the principal's strategy of recognizing disciplined teachers and applying gradual warnings for violations reinforced the message that school policies are binding and must be followed by all parties.

The use of digital technology to manage attendance, communication, and task reporting supports recent findings on the digitalization of school management. [19] found that school management information systems affect teacher discipline because attendance and task implementation can be monitored more objectively and in real time. [21] showed that electronic attendance systems and the integration of e-attendance with teacher performance reporting can improve work discipline and accountability in schools.

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

4.1. Conclusion

Based on the findings, it can be concluded that the principal plays a decisive role as a change agent in building a culture of teacher compliance with school policies through role modeling, continuous coaching and supervision, participatory two-way communication, and the empowerment of teachers and education personnel. These efforts are reinforced by the commitment of most teachers, a warm work climate, simple recognition systems, and the use of digital technology, but are simultaneously challenged by resistance to change, heavy teaching and administrative workloads, gaps in technological competence, and a history of inconsistent rule enforcement. In this context, principal strategies that combine role modeling, proportional rewards and sanctions, optimized information systems and digital attendance, and a stronger culture of mutual reminders have proven to encourage a shift from formal compliance toward compliance grounded in professional awareness and school members' collective responsibility for educational quality.

4.2. Recommendations

Based on these findings, principals are recommended to continue strengthening their leadership role as primary role

models and drivers of change by developing more structured, documented, and mentoring-oriented coaching and supervision practices, while consistently applying fair and transparent systems of rewards and sanctions. Teachers and education personnel are expected to strengthen their professional commitment and readiness to adapt to new policies and technologies, as well as to reinforce a culture of mutual reminders and collaboration so that policy compliance genuinely becomes a shared norm rather than compliance driven only by supervision. Policymakers and education managers should provide continuous training, strengthen digital competence, and ensure adequate facilities and infrastructure for schools. Future researchers may quantitatively test the relationship among principal leadership, school culture, and teacher compliance across different educational levels and school contexts to enrich the empirical evidence in this field.

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