

Instructional Leadership in Literacy-Based Learning: Enhancing Teachers' Pedagogical Competence in Primary Schools

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the management of school principals in fostering teachers' pedagogical competence through the implementation of literacy-based learning programs in two public elementary schools in Cianjur Regency: SDN Cikamancing and SDN Situwangi. Using a qualitative case study approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observations, and documentation studies involving principals, teachers, students, parents, and school staff. Data were analyzed using Miles and Huberman's interactive model through data reduction, presentation, and conclusion drawing. The findings reveal significant differences between the two schools. SDN Situwangi demonstrated more systematic and comprehensive management characterized by strategic planning, organized literacy teams, interactive literacy practices, and reflective supervision. In contrast, SDN Cikamancing emphasized routine reading activities without structured innovation or pedagogical integration. Consequently, teacher pedagogical competence improved more markedly at SDN Situwangi, as reflected in the ability to design literacy-based lesson plans and integrate literacy across subjects. The results confirm that principal leadership is a decisive factor in enhancing pedagogical competence through literacy programs. Effective management comprising integrated planning, structured organization, diverse implementation, and developmental supervision creates a sustainable system that fosters teachers' professional growth. This study reinforces prior findings by Ansori, Suyatno, and Sulisworo (2021); Sudiati et al. (2025); and Damayanti et al. (2020), while contributing a holistic framework that links literacy initiatives to pedagogical competence development in primary education.

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Introduction

1 Background

The improvement of primary school teachers' pedagogical competence remains a fundamental issue in Indonesian education (Yufita et al., 2021). Based on 2022 National Assessment data, more than 30% of teachers in Cianjur Regency had pedagogical achievements below the national standard. This condition reflects that many teachers still focus the learning process solely on cognitive aspects, without cultivating literacy skills, which are the main foundation for mastering 21st-century competencies (Dewi et al., 2021; Pantiwati et al., 2022).

This aligns with findings that suboptimal teacher quality, especially in pedagogical, literacy, and numeracy aspects, contributed to the low PISA scores of Indonesian students in 2022 (Alfaruqi & Nurwahidah, 2025; Imron et al., 2023). Consequently, students' literacy abilities are also low, impacting the weakness of critical, creative, and communicative thinking skills among learners (Fajari, 2021; Kintoko et al., 2024). This problem is further exacerbated by the fact that one out of two students in Indonesia has not reached the lowest literacy competence, indicating a "literacy emergency" that requires special intervention (Imron et al., 2023).

The low literacy skills of students essentially reflect weaknesses in teachers' pedagogical practices (Samala et al., 2024). Yet, teachers play a crucial role in determining the success of literary learning in primary schools, with literacy being an important foundation for students' cognitive development (Alamsyah et al., 2025). Limitations in teachers' ability to integrate literacy into the learning process cause learning activities to become monotonous, less challenging, and minimal in reflective activities. Therefore, systematic coaching is needed so that teachers can combine literacy with educational and meaningful learning strategies. The importance of this is emphasized by the fact that teachers' intellectual skills positively influence students' writing and critical thinking abilities (Amhar et al., 2022). Thus, literacy strengthening training for teachers becomes crucial to equip them to be skilled in implementing digital literacy and creating a sustainable literacy culture in schools (Alamsyah et al., 2025). Nevertheless, many teachers still have a mistaken understanding of literacy, often limiting its meaning to merely reading and writing skills, and only viewing it as a language practice exercise (Meliyanti & Aryanto, 2022).

In the context of professional teacher development, school principals hold a strategic position as instructional leaders. Their role is not merely as educational administrators but also as mentors, companions, and directors in improving the quality of learning (He et al., 2024). School principals are obligated to plan, organize, implement, and evaluate literacy-based learning programs (Sahwi & Citriadin, 2025). Research shows that instructional leadership by school principals significantly improves teaching quality, teacher professional development, and student learning outcomes (He et al., 2024; Ralebese et al., 2025). Through effective coaching management, school principals are expected to create a deeply rooted literacy culture and continuously strengthen teachers' pedagogical competence (Herawati & Tjahjono, 2020; Mestry et al., 2013).

SDN Cikamancing and SDN Situwangi in Cianjur Regency represent concrete examples of how schools in rural areas face literacy challenges. Both schools exhibit similar problems such as low student literacy achievement and limited teacher pedagogical competence. However, both have begun to show initiative in developing teacher coaching through a literary approach designed by the school principal. This condition provides an important reason to thoroughly investigate the school principal's coaching management strategy in improving literacy-based teacher pedagogical competence. This study therefore aims to analyze the specific strategies employed by school principals in these contexts to foster literacy skills among educators, thereby enhancing overall pedagogical effectiveness.

2 Previous Literature Review

Several studies have explored aspects of teacher pedagogical competence, literacy integration, and school leadership management, but each has focused on specific elements rather than an integrated approach. For instance, Damayanti et al. (2020) examined pedagogical competence among teachers in SMP Negeri 1 Prabumulih. The study indicated that although teachers were classified as having "good" pedagogical competence, they faced challenges such as limited curriculum understanding, low use of learning media, and

inadequate ICT skills. This highlights the persistent barriers in achieving effective pedagogical practice in schools.

Similarly, Sudiati et al. (2025) investigated teacher learning communities and found that well-managed communities positively influenced teacher pedagogical competence. The study emphasizes that structured planning, organization, implementation, and supervision contribute to teachers' professional development.

Ansori et al. (2021) analyzed the role of school principals in enhancing teachers' pedagogical and professional competence in Indonesian elementary schools. The study demonstrated that principals as managers, instructional leaders, and innovators significantly contribute to the improvement of teacher competencies through guidance, supervision, and mentoring.

Finally, Huzaefah & Lubis (2021) explored the impact of the School Literacy Movement on primary school teachers' reading interest in Depok City. While the program improved teacher literacy interest, a notable portion of teachers still exhibited low engagement, suggesting that literacy initiatives alone are insufficient without managerial support from school leadership.

2. Research Gap

Despite the contributions of these studies, several significant gaps remain in the existing literature. Most prior research has examined teacher pedagogical competence, teacher learning communities, or school principal leadership in isolation. Consequently, there is limited research that integrates these critical components to analyze how principal-led management strategies can effectively foster literacy-based teaching and concurrently enhance teachers' pedagogical competence, particularly within the context of rural elementary schools. Furthermore, research specifically addressing teacher literacy, including teachers' reading interest or their engagement in literacy programs, has rarely been explicitly linked to structured principal-led management or mentorship strategies. This oversight is particularly pertinent given the unique challenges faced by rural elementary schools, such as limited resources, teachers often assuming multiple roles, and significant geographical constraints. These conditions highlight a substantial need for research in rural settings that rigorously investigates the intricate interplay between literacy, pedagogical competence, and the strategic leadership of school principals.

This study offers several innovative contributions that address the identified research gaps. It uniquely investigates the integrated relationship between principal management strategies, the implementation of literacy-based teaching, and their collective impact on teachers' pedagogical competence. A core strength of this research is its specific focus on rural elementary schools, specifically SDN Cikamancing and SDN Situwangi in Cianjur Regency, thereby providing crucial empirical insights into contexts that are notably underrepresented in the broader academic literature. From a practical standpoint, the study aims to develop a replicable management strategy model for principals, designed to enhance teacher competence through literacy-oriented mentorship, which can be adapted and applied in other rural elementary school settings.

Based on the comprehensive literature review and the identified research gaps, this study aims to achieve several key objectives. Firstly, it seeks to describe the specific management strategies implemented by school principals to enhance teachers' pedagogical competence through literacy-based teaching. Secondly, the study will analyze the application of the four fundamental managerial functions planning, organizing, implementation, and evaluation as they pertain to teacher development based on literacy at SDN Cikamancing and SDN Situwangi. Finally, a crucial objective is to identify both the supporting and inhibiting

factors that influence the successful implementation of principal-led literacy-based teacher development in rural elementary schools.

Specifically, this research aims to describe the planning process of human resource management in improving teacher performance in elementary schools. Furthermore, this research will analyze the implementation of HR management programs that directly support teacher professional development. In addition, this study will also evaluate the effectiveness of the implementation and assessment of teacher performance within the framework of PDCA-based HR management. Finally, this research aims to identify follow-up actions and continuous improvement strategies in HR management to enhance learning quality. The results of this research are expected to provide a strong empirical overview of HR management practices in elementary schools, as well as generate concrete and actionable strategic recommendations for schools to improve and optimize educational quality through strengthening teacher performance. Ultimately, this research seeks to bridge the existing gap between theory and practice, providing a robust framework for enhancing teacher effectiveness and, consequently, student learning outcomes within the elementary school setting.

Method

This study employed a qualitative approach with a case study design, chosen to provide an in-depth and holistic understanding of how school principals manage teacher coaching to implement literacy-based learning aimed at improving teachers' pedagogical competence. The case study design is particularly appropriate because it allows for the examination of complex educational phenomena in their natural context, capturing the interactions between principals, teachers, students, parents, and school staff (Stake, 2017; Yin, 2018). Furthermore, this study emphasizes the comparative aspect, analyzing teachers' pedagogical competence before and after the implementation of principal-led literacy coaching, which provides insights into the effectiveness of school management strategies in improving teaching quality.

The research was conducted in two public elementary schools in Cianjur Regency, Indonesia, namely SDN Cikamancing and SDN Situwangi. These schools were selected based on differences in managerial conditions and the level of teacher engagement in literacy programs, offering a diverse perspective on school leadership and coaching strategies. The participants were purposively sampled, focusing on those directly involved in literacy teaching and school management activities, including school principals, teachers, education staff, parents, and students. This sampling ensured that the data reflected experiences from stakeholders actively participating in literacy-based pedagogical initiatives.

Data collection involved a triangulation of methods, combining in-depth interviews with principals, teachers, parents, and students, participatory observations of literacy-based teaching practices and school literacy programs, and document analysis of school planning documents, supervision reports, and evaluation results of literacy activities. This combination of methods enabled the researcher to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the coaching practices, stakeholder perspectives, and tangible evidence of literacy program implementation.

The research procedure followed three main stages: preparation, implementation, and finalization. During the preparation stage, the researcher developed research instruments, obtained necessary permissions, and conducted preliminary field exploration to understand the school context. The implementation stage involved systematic data collection through interviews, observation, and documentation, followed by transcription and organization of the collected data for analysis. The final stage comprised data analysis and conclusion drawing,

with verification of findings through source and method triangulation and member checking to ensure accuracy and credibility of the information.

Data were analyzed using the interactive model of (Miles, M.B & Huberman, 1994), which involves data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. Information obtained from interviews, observations, and documentation was coded and analyzed to identify patterns, themes, and relationships between principals' coaching strategies and teachers' pedagogical competence. Particular attention was given to comparing teachers' pedagogical competence before and after the literacy-based coaching, which allowed for assessment of the effectiveness of the intervention and identification of supporting or inhibiting factors.

By employing this approach, the study is expected to provide a deep understanding of principal-led coaching management in rural elementary schools and to deliver empirical evidence regarding the impact of literacy-based learning programs on the enhancement of teachers' pedagogical competence. This approach aligns with classic perspectives on qualitative case study research and instructional leadership, emphasizing contextual analysis, holistic understanding, and practical implications (Bogdan & Taylor, 1975).

Result

This study reveals a significant disparity between SDN Cikamancing and SDN Situwangi regarding the management of literacy-based teacher coaching and its impact on pedagogical competence. SDN Cikamancing primarily emphasized routine literacy activities with little methodological variation. In contrast, SDN Situwangi implemented a more systematic literacy program, supported by a dedicated literacy team, reading corners, and regular reflective practices. This contrast underscores the critical influence of the school principal's role as an instructional leader in enhancing teacher competency.

1 Principal's Planning for Literacy-Based Learning

The planning stage for literacy coaching differed markedly between the two schools. SDN Cikamancing's approach was limited to routine activities, such as a mandatory 15-minute morning reading session. Conversely, SDN Situwangi had comprehensively integrated literacy into its curriculum, school programs, and lesson plans (RPPs). Interviews with the principal of SDN Cikamancing indicated that while a regular reading schedule was established, the activities were confined to reading storybooks. They did not extend to writing exercises, discussions, or connecting the reading materials to other subjects. This suggests the school's literacy program was still in its nascent stage, prioritizing reading habits over comprehension and critical thinking skills. In contrast, the principal of SDN Situwangi reported that teachers were actively encouraged to integrate literacy objectives into their lesson plans. Furthermore, the school involved parents by encouraging them to provide reading materials at home, fostering a continuous literacy environment beyond the classroom. This reflects a more holistic and collaborative strategy for cultivating a literacy culture.

2 Principal's Organization of Literacy Coaching

The organization of resources was more systematic at SDN Situwangi than at SDN Cikamancing. SDN Situwangi established a formal School Literacy Team with clearly defined roles and responsibilities. SDN Cikamancing, however, assigned teachers to literacy duties on a rotational basis without a formal supporting structure. Interviews with teachers at SDN Cikamancing confirmed that literacy activities were implemented individually, lacking

coordination by a dedicated team. This indicates that the practices were ad hoc and not supported by a systematic organizational mechanism. These findings show that SDN Cikamancing relied on individual teacher initiative without a clear structure, whereas SDN Situwangi fostered a structured, collaborative approach that included family participation.

3 Principal's Implementation of Literacy Coaching

The implementation of literacy activities also varied significantly. SDN Cikamancing maintained a focus on reading routines, while SDN Situwangi conducted diverse activities, including shared reading, summary writing, and group discussions. Interviews with students at SDN Cikamancing revealed that literacy activities were relatively simplistic, typically involving silent reading followed by a brief teacher-led conclusion without interactive follow-up. This approach did not yet foster critical thinking or communication skills. Conversely, students at SDN Situwangi reported more varied and engaging experiences, such as reading with peers and presenting stories to the class. This promoted active student participation through interactive literacy activities. Classroom observations supported these accounts. At SDN Cikamancing, students read individually with no subsequent interaction. At SDN Situwangi, students engaged in a more comprehensive literacy process that involved reading, writing, speaking, and critical thinking.

4 Supervision and Evaluation

The supervisory approach also differed. At SDN Cikamancing, the principal's supervision was predominantly administrative, while at SDN Situwangi, it was more in-depth and included constructive, written feedback. Teachers at SDN Cikamancing reported that classroom supervision primarily checked administrative completeness, such as document availability, without involving reflective discussions or guidance for professional development. This suggests supervision had not yet become a tool for improving pedagogical competence. In contrast, the principal at SDN Situwangi conducted comprehensive supervision. Following observations, teachers received written feedback aimed at guiding their practice, addressing deficiencies, and reinforcing effective teaching strategies. Thus, supervision functioned not only as a control mechanism but also as a catalyst for professional growth.

5 Improvement of Teachers' Pedagogical Competence

The study found that the improvement in teachers' pedagogical competence was more pronounced at SDN Situwangi than at SDN Cikamancing. Teachers at SDN Situwangi demonstrated a greater ability to design literacy-based lesson plans, integrate literacy into their teaching, and evaluate student learning outcomes effectively. Teachers at SDN Cikamancing reported only limited integration of literacy into their teaching materials, with minor, superficial additions to their lesson plans. This indicates a need for further training and sustained guidance to embed literacy meaningfully into learning activities. Meanwhile, teachers at SDN Situwangi expressed a growing understanding of how to link literacy with subject-specific content. This reflects positive development in their pedagogical competence, demonstrating that the school's structured literacy coaching had a tangible impact on teaching practices.

6 Comparison Table of Pre- and Post-Intervention Outcomes

Aspect	SDN Cikamancing	SDN Situwangi	Changes After Intervention
Planning	15-minute daily reading; focus on storybooks.	Integrated into curriculum, RPP, and school programs; involved parents.	SDN Situwangi: Literacy became part of thematic learning. SDN Cikamancing: Remained limited to habitual reading.
Organization	Teachers rotated without a formal team.	Formal School Literacy Team with clear responsibilities; family involvement.	SDN Situwangi: More systematic and collaborative. SDN Cikamancing: Individual and unstructured.
Implementation	Individual reading; minimal discussion, writing, or reflection.	Shared reading, summary writing, and group discussions.	SDN Situwangi: Students actively engaged in reading, writing, speaking, and critical thinking. SDN Cikamancing: Focused solely on reading.
Supervision & Evaluation	Administrative; limited to document checks.	In-depth supervision with written feedback; focus on professional development.	SDN Situwangi: Supervision enhanced pedagogical skills. SDN Cikamancing: Remained administrative with minimal guidance.
Teachers' Pedagogical Competence	Limited: minimal literacy integration; basic understanding.	Higher: literacy-based lesson plans, cross-subject integration, improved student evaluation.	SDN Situwangi: Significant improvement. SDN Cikamancing: Minimal improvement.

Discussion

The findings of this study affirm that the management strategies employed by school principals are a critical determinant in enhancing teachers' pedagogical competence through literacy-based programs. The comparative analysis between SDN Cikamancing and SDN Situwangi demonstrates that a holistic approach encompassing structured planning, systematic organization, diverse implementation, and comprehensive supervision yields significantly greater improvements in teacher competency. This aligns with established literature underscoring the importance of instructional leadership, professional learning communities, and well-supported literacy initiatives in teacher development.

1 Principal's Planning and Pedagogical Competence

The contrast between the two schools was evident at the planning stage. At SDN Situwangi, literacy was strategically integrated into the curriculum, lesson plans (RPPs), and school programs, whereas SDN Cikamancing primarily focused on maintaining habitual reading routines. Interviews and observations revealed that SDN Situwangi's planning

included coordination with parents and integration into multiple subjects, fostering a more comprehensive literacy culture. This disparity suggests that a principal's strategic planning directly influences the depth and quality of pedagogical practices. As Ansori et al. (2021) emphasized, principals, as instructional leaders, play a critical role in guiding and mentoring teachers. The present study confirms that systematic planning of literacy programs equips teachers to design meaningful, integrated lesson plans, thereby directly enhancing their pedagogical effectiveness.

2 Organization and Teacher Engagement

The presence of a formal School Literacy Team at SDN Situwangi highlights how organizational structure underpins program success. Sudiati et al. (2025) found that well-managed teacher learning communities positively impact pedagogical competence by providing a framework for collaboration. Similarly, the structured team at SDN Situwangi facilitated coordinated activities, clear role distribution, and family involvement, thereby enhancing both teacher engagement and program sustainability. In contrast, the ad hoc, rotational approach at SDN Cikamancing resulted in uncoordinated and inconsistent literacy activities, underscoring that intention alone is insufficient without systematic organization. These findings align with observations that SDN Situwangi teachers were more confident and active in integrating literacy into classroom activities compared to their peers at SDN Cikamancing.

3 Implementation of Literacy Activities

Beyond planning and structure, the nature of the activities themselves is crucial. The varied and interactive literacy exercises at SDN Situwangi such as shared reading, summary writing, and discussions required teachers to employ a broader range of pedagogical skills, effectively translating literacy theory into practice across subjects. This supports Huzaefah & Lubis (2021), who noted that without robust managerial support, the pedagogical impact of literacy programs remains limited. In SDN Cikamancing, literacy activities were repetitive and non-interactive, demonstrating that the quality of execution is a key factor in determining whether literacy activities genuinely enhance pedagogical practice. Observations corroborated these findings, showing that students at SDN Situwangi engaged in higher-order thinking tasks, while SDN Cikamancing students primarily performed individual reading.

4 Supervision, Feedback, and Professional Growth

The study further identifies supervision as a pivotal differentiator. The reflective model at SDN Situwangi, where principals provided specific written feedback after classroom observation, created a direct channel for professional growth and continuous improvement. This practice is a cornerstone of instructional leadership, as affirmed by Ansori, Suyatno, and Sulisworo (2021). Conversely, the administrative-focused supervision at SDN Cikamancing, which prioritized document checks over pedagogical dialogue, failed to function as a lever for developing teacher competence. Interviews indicated that teachers at SDN Situwangi used feedback to refine lesson plans and enhance student engagement, whereas SDN Cikamancing teachers reported minimal change in teaching practice.

5 Integrated Impact on Teachers' Pedagogical Competence

In synthesis, this study demonstrates that principal-led literacy coaching is most effective when it is an integrated system of strategic planning, solid organization, interactive

implementation, and reflective supervision. These components work synergistically to produce significant gains in pedagogical competence. These findings resonate with Damayanti et al. (2020), who highlighted that even competent teachers are hindered by limited instructional support. The results reinforce the conclusions of Sudiati et al. (2025) on the value of organized teacher communities and Ansori et al. (2021) on the indispensability of effective principal leadership. The evidence from SDN Situwangi illustrates that when principals strategically plan, organize, implement, and supervise literacy initiatives, teachers not only improve pedagogical skills but also demonstrate increased motivation and engagement, resulting in sustainable educational improvement.

Conclusion

This study concludes that the effectiveness of teachers' pedagogical competence development in literacy-based learning is strongly determined by the principal's management strategies. The comparative evidence from SDN Cikamancing and SDN Situwangi clearly shows that schools with structured planning, systematic organization, interactive implementation, and reflective supervision experience more significant improvements in teachers' pedagogical performance. The leadership role of the principal extends beyond administrative oversight to include active instructional guidance and collaborative capacity-building. Strategic planning that integrates literacy into school programs and lesson plans ensures that teachers understand literacy not merely as a reading habit but as an instructional approach embedded in every learning process. Effective organizational structures, such as the formation of literacy teams, facilitate coordination, accountability, and sustainability of literacy activities. Furthermore, diverse and interactive literacy practices strengthen teachers' ability to design engaging learning experiences, thereby nurturing students' higher-order thinking skills. Reflective supervision accompanied by constructive feedback fosters a culture of continuous professional growth. The study emphasizes that literacy-based pedagogical improvement is not an isolated task but a systemic process driven by strong instructional leadership. Principals who manage literacy initiatives through integrated management functions planning, organizing, implementing, and supervising are more successful in transforming literacy programs into sustainable pedagogical innovations. Consequently, fostering such leadership practices is essential for building teacher competence and promoting a school culture that values literacy as the foundation of effective education.

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