



The Principal as Instructional Leader: The Role of Academic Supervision in Strengthening the Performance of Elementary School Teachers

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Abstract - Principals play a strategic role as instructional leaders in ensuring the quality of learning in elementary schools through academic supervision. However, the implementation of academic supervision is often not optimal in supporting the improvement of teachers' competence and performance. This study aims to analyze the role of principals' academic supervision in strengthening the performance of elementary school teachers based on findings from previous scientific literature. The research uses a qualitative approach with a literature study method through searching and analyzing secondary sources in the form of books, journal articles, and related policy documents. Data analysis was conducted using content analysis techniques through the processes of identification, categorization, and thematic interpretation. The results of the study indicate that the principal, as an instructional leader, plays an important role in teacher professional development through academic supervision that is systematically designed, mentoring-oriented, and collaborative in nature. Effective academic supervision has been proven to improve teachers' pedagogical abilities, professionalism, and work responsibility, which has an impact on improving the quality of learning and student learning outcomes. Thus, academic supervision is a strategic instrument for principals in strengthening teacher performance and the quality of education in elementary schools.

Keywords: Academic Supervision, Instructional Leadership, Literature Review

I. INTRODUCTION

Improving the quality of primary education is a strategic priority in preparing a generation with 21st-century competencies, such as literacy, creativity, critical thinking, and collaborative skills. Teachers, as the main implementers of the learning process, play an essential role in ensuring the achievement of educational goals through professional, innovative, and student-centered teaching practices. However, various studies show that the performance of elementary school teachers in Indonesia still faces significant challenges, such as low pedagogical innovation, weak professional reflection culture, and suboptimal use of learning technology (Sagala, 2022; Nugroho, 2023; Putri & Sunandar, 2023). The implementation of authentic assessment, which should be a competency-based evaluation instrument, is still not optimal, resulting in low quality of student learning outcomes (Hasanah, 2024).

From the perspective of modern education management, school principals not only act as administrators who manage the school organization structurally, but also as instructional leaders who ensure the quality of the learning process and outcomes. Academic supervision is a key instrument in improving teacher competence through professional mentoring, providing reflective feedback, classroom observation, and facilitating self-development in line with teachers' needs (Glickman et al., 2018). Research shows the positive contribution of academic supervision to improving teachers' skills in lesson planning, effective delivery of material, and assessment of student learning outcomes (Putri & Sunandar, 2023; Hasanah, 2024).

However, some previous literature still focuses on the technical aspects of supervision or its relationship with student learning achievement. Studies that place academic supervision in the perspective of principal learning leadership as a strategy to strengthen teacher performance are still relatively limited. This condition indicates a

research gap that needs to be studied more deeply to strengthen the theoretical basis regarding the implementation of academic supervision as a practice of instructional leadership in improving the quality of continuous learning.

In line with the dynamics of national education policy and the challenges of the digital era, principals are required to have adaptive abilities in implementing academic supervision that is appropriate to the school context and the professional needs of teachers. Various obstacles, such as limited learning technology facilities, the high administrative burden on principals, and disparities in teacher quality between regions, are factors that can hinder the effectiveness of supervision (Rachmawati, 2022; Maryani & Setiawan, 2024). Therefore, academic supervision must be interpreted as a professional development process oriented towards continuous improvement through strengthening collaboration, pedagogical reflection, and emotional support for teachers (Glickman et al., 2018).

Furthermore, the 21st-century education paradigm demands the implementation of participatory, data-driven academic supervision that supports the use of digital technology. Principals, as instructional leaders, are required to utilize learning data such as formative assessments, classroom observations, and teacher reflections as a basis for developing precise intervention strategies (Marzano, 2020). Strengthening evidence-based supervision is expected to develop teachers' pedagogical competencies holistically, including in the application of differentiated learning, the use of modern learning technologies, and authentic assessments that are in line with the strengthening of the Pancasila Student Profile.

In addition, the effectiveness of academic supervision is influenced by the principal's ability to apply a leadership approach that empowers teachers. A supervisory approach that provides space for creativity, encourages collaborative problem solving, and facilitates professional reflection can increase teacher motivation and learning innovation

relevant to student needs (Sergiovanni, 2015). In this context, the principal acts as a facilitator and coach who provides support without reducing teachers' professional autonomy.

The school's organizational culture also plays an important role in the successful implementation of academic supervision. Schools that develop a collaborative work environment, are open to change, and have a shared commitment to improving the quality of learning will find it easier to achieve supervision that has a significant impact (Hoy & Miskel, 2021). Strengthening the educational vision through effective communication and the formation of professional learning communities are strategic steps in supporting the continuous improvement of teacher competence.

Furthermore, academic supervision needs to be integrated with needs-based professional development programs for teachers. This approach ensures that supervision does not only focus on evaluation but also identifies gaps in teacher competencies and provides targeted training (OECD, 2020). Thus, professional development for teachers becomes more focused and has a real impact on improving the quality of learning.

The Merdeka Belajar (Freedom of Learning) policy, which emphasizes curriculum flexibility, differentiated learning, and competency-based assessment, further emphasizes the importance of the principal's role as an instructional leader. Principals must be able to assist teachers in translating these policies into contextual and student-centered learning practices (Kemdikbudristek, 2023). This makes academic supervision a strategic instrument in bridging national policies and learning practices in elementary schools.

The various challenges and opportunities outlined above reinforce the urgency of research on the role of principal academic supervision in improving teacher performance. This research is expected to contribute to theory and practice, as well as broaden understanding of effective academic supervision implementation strategies in promoting adaptive, systemic, and sustainable transformation of learning quality in elementary schools.

II. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This study uses a qualitative approach with a library research method, which is the process of collecting, evaluating, and analyzing data sourced from scientific documents such as books, national and international journal articles, proceedings, and government regulations related to academic supervision, instructional leadership, and elementary school teacher performance. The selection of literature sources was conducted purposively based on the following inclusion criteria: (1) published between 2018 and 2024 to ensure the data is current, except for classic works that form the theoretical basis; (2) has academic credibility, such as being published by a reputable publisher or indexed journal; and (3) has strong relevance to the research focus. Data analysis in this study used content analysis techniques through several systematic stages. The first stage was identification, which was an initial review to select literature based on the core concepts examined in the study. The second stage is categorization, which is grouping the review results into main themes such as the role of the principal as an instructional leader, the implementation of academic supervision, and its contribution to improving teacher

performance. The third stage is thematic interpretation, which is conducting a comparative and critical synthesis of data to produce strong and focused theoretical arguments. The validity of the data is tested using source triangulation, which is comparing findings from various articles and documents to ensure consistency of information and avoid interpretive bias. Through this literature study design, the research is expected to present a comprehensive and in-depth conceptual analysis of the contribution of principal academic supervision in improving the performance of elementary school teachers in a sustainable manner.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Academic Supervision as a Strategic Instrument for Improving Teacher Competence

Academic supervision is a process of professional development for teachers that is carried out in a planned, systematic, and continuous manner through classroom observation, learning evaluation, and the provision of constructive feedback based on data (Glickman et al., 2018).

Putri and Sunandar (2023) emphasize that the implementation of effective academic supervision can improve teachers' abilities in designing learning tools, actively managing classrooms, and developing authentic assessments. In addition, Hasanah (2024) found that the dialogic supervision model is able to foster reflective awareness and self-improvement, thereby directly impacting the improvement of classroom learning quality.

2. The Role of the Principal as an Instructional Leader in Optimizing Academic Supervision

From an instructional leadership perspective, the principal plays a strategic role in ensuring the quality of the learning process through pedagogical coaching, learning innovation assistance, and strengthening a reflective culture in schools (Marzano, 2020). Maryani and Setiawan (2024) found that principals with strong learning leadership are able to encourage teachers to apply innovative learning models and utilize technology effectively. Thus, academic supervision based on instructional leadership can function not only as administrative control but also as a driver of teacher professionalism transformation.

3. The Contribution of Academic Supervision to Strengthening the Performance of Elementary School Teachers

A literature review shows the significant contribution of academic supervision to improving teacher performance in three main areas:

- Strengthening learning planning in the preparation of objectives, lesson plans, media, and assessment instruments;
- Improving learning implementation of innovative pedagogical strategies, educational interactions, and the use of ICT;
- Learning evaluation: data-based reflection skills and continuous improvement follow-up (Rachmawati, 2022; Nugroho, 2023).

These contributions have an impact on increasing student motivation, the quality of learning interactions, and learning outcomes.

4. Challenges in Implementing Academic Supervision in Elementary Schools

The implementation of academic supervision has not been fully optimized due to various obstacles. Rachmawati (2022) noted that the high administrative burden on school principals hinders the implementation of in-depth and intensive supervision. In addition, the perception of supervision as an inspection rather than professional guidance causes teachers to be less motivated to innovate (Maryani & Setiawan, 2024). Furthermore, there are still limitations in the ability of school principals to provide specific, solution-oriented, and constructive feedback. Therefore, it is urgent to improve the capacity of school principals in coaching, professional communication, and learning data analysis.

5. Technology-Based Academic Supervision as an Innovative Strategy for the 21st Century

In line with digital transformation, academic supervision needs to utilize technology to improve the effectiveness of teacher mentoring. The use of video observation platforms, e-monitoring of learning documents, and formative assessment applications makes supervision more flexible, faster, and more structured (Marzano, 2020). This strategy also contributes to improving teachers' pedagogical technology literacy and supports the implementation of innovative learning that is adaptive to the needs of 21st-century students.

IV. CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the literature review that has been conducted, it can be concluded that academic supervision is a strategic instrument for school principals in optimizing the performance of elementary school teachers. As instructional leaders, school principals play a direct role in ensuring the quality of planning, implementation, and evaluation of learning through a structured, dialogical, and continuous professional development process. The implementation of professional academic supervision has been proven to improve teachers' pedagogical competence, professionalism, and work commitment, which ultimately has an impact on improving the quality of learning and student learning outcomes in elementary schools. However, the effectiveness of academic supervision is still influenced by a number of challenges, such as the limited leadership competence of school principals, high administrative burdens, a low culture of teacher reflection, and the suboptimal use of learning technology. These conditions emphasize the importance of strengthening the capacity of school principals in evidence-based, collaborative, and context-appropriate learning leadership that meets the professional needs of teachers in each school.

In addition, effective academic supervision requires the support of a conducive school organizational ecosystem. Clear school policies, proportional division of tasks, and the provision of adequate facilities and infrastructure are important elements in creating a professional, innovative, and continuous competency development-oriented work environment. Strong collaboration between principals, teachers, supervisors, and other stakeholders is necessary to promote a culture of quality and productivity among teachers.

In the era of digital transformation, optimizing the use of technology in academic supervision is an essential requirement. The use of digital platforms for learning

observation, performance monitoring, and feedback allows for more effective, efficient, and well-documented supervision. This innovation will accelerate the realization of a professional learning culture and accelerate the improvement of basic education quality relevant to the competency demands of the 21st century.

Thus, this study confirms that school principals who optimally perform their role as instructional leaders are the key to the success of holistic and sustainable transformation of basic education quality in facing the dynamics of change in the future.

Based on the results of previous theoretical and research reviews, academic supervision has a significant contribution to improving teacher performance, but still needs to be strengthened in its implementation to be more optimal.

Therefore, a number of policy recommendations are needed that can serve as a reference for school principals, local governments, and education stakeholders in improving the effectiveness of academic supervision in elementary schools in a sustainable manner. These recommendations include:

a. Strengthening the Competence of School Principals as Instructional Leaders

Local governments and educational institutions need to organize ongoing training related to academic supervision, coaching, mentoring, and data-based learning leadership to improve the professional capacity of school principals.

b. Optimizing Technology-Based Academic Supervision

Schools need to utilize digital platforms in the planning, observation, and evaluation of academic supervision so that the coaching process can be more flexible, efficient, and systematically documented.

c. Strengthening a Work Environment that Supports Teacher Professionalism

School policies must encourage a culture of reflection, collaboration, and continuous professional development so that teachers are more motivated to improve their performance and innovate in learning.

d. Collaboration Among Education Stakeholders

School principals, teachers, school supervisors, and school committees need to establish strong partnerships in monitoring and evaluating teacher performance to support the improvement of learning quality and educational quality control.

e. More Empirical Follow-up Research

Future research should involve field data through observation, interviews, or surveys to strengthen empirical evidence and validate the findings of this literature-based study.

Therefore, academic supervision is important to improve teacher performance. Principals play a role in ensuring the quality of learning. Effective implementation improves teacher competence.

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