

Leadership Strategies of School Principals in Developing Teacher Professionalism

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to describe the leadership strategies of school principals in developing teacher professionalism and to identify the supporting and inhibiting factors in their implementation. This research employed a qualitative approach with a phenomenological design and was conducted at TK Negeri Pembina 3 Pekanbaru and RA An-Nisa Pekanbaru. The main informants were two school principals, while teachers from both institutions served as supporting informants selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, observation, and documentation, and analyzed through data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings show that school principals implemented several strategies to develop teacher professionalism, including continuous academic supervision, providing motivation and encouragement, facilitating competency development through training and professional development activities, and strengthening communication and collaboration between principals and teachers. Supporting factors included good communication and collaboration, teacher commitment to continuous development, colleague support, professional development programs, and adequate facilities and infrastructure. Inhibiting factors included limited teacher time, differences in teachers' ability to adapt, budget constraints, and changes in educational policies and curricula. The study concludes that principal leadership strategies support the continuous development of teacher professionalism according to the conditions and needs of each institution in an effective and sustainable professional manner.

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INTRODUCTION

Early Childhood Education (ECE) is an important level of education that provides the foundation for children's growth and development. The quality of education at this level is influenced not only by the learning process provided to children but also by the competence and professionalism of teachers who implement it. Early childhood teachers are required to have adequate competencies to plan, implement, and evaluate learning activities according to children's developmental characteristics and needs. Therefore, continuous teacher professional development is an important aspect of improving the quality of learning and educational services in early childhood education. Teacher professional development can be strengthened through continuous training, academic supervision, professional guidance, and institutional support (Purnama et al., 2021; Isriyati, 2020).

School principals have a strategic role in supporting the professional development of teachers. Their responsibilities are not limited to administrative management but also include providing guidance, conducting academic supervision, motivating teachers, and facilitating competency development. Leadership

that includes professional guidance, supervision, motivation, and institutional support can contribute to the creation of a work environment that encourages teachers to improve their professional competence (Antoni, 2020; Al Faruq & Supriyanto, 2025). In addition, leadership strategies implemented continuously can focus on teacher professional development, competency improvement, motivation, and the establishment of harmonious working relationships between principals and teachers (Masrin & Muzakir, 2025; Wibowo & Santosa, 2022).

Problems related to teacher professionalism were identified in the context of this study. Based on preliminary observations at TK Negeri Pembina 3 Pekanbaru, several teachers were found to be less than optimal in preparing learning materials. Classroom learning also tended to be monotonous, while the development and use of innovative learning media remained limited. In addition, professional guidance and academic supervision had not been implemented optimally and continuously. These conditions indicate the need for appropriate leadership strategies that can provide more directed, systematic, and sustainable support for teacher professional development.

One effort that can be made to address these problems is through the implementation of leadership strategies that emphasize academic supervision, professional guidance, teacher motivation, competency development, and effective communication and collaboration. Through these strategies, school principals are expected to create conditions that encourage teachers to improve their knowledge, skills, and professional attitudes. The implementation of leadership strategies also needs to be adjusted to the conditions, resources, and needs of each educational institution so that professional development programs can be implemented effectively and sustainably.

Several previous studies have discussed the relationship between school leadership and teacher professionalism. Librianty (2021) found that school principals can contribute to improving teacher professionalism through professional guidance, exemplary practices, and the creation of a conducive work culture. Sahadatunnisa et al. (2023) also emphasized that teacher professionalism in early childhood education can be improved through training, professional guidance, and continuous institutional support. Meanwhile, Wibowo and Santosa (2022) highlighted the importance of academic supervision, professional guidance, and teacher competency development as part of leadership efforts to improve teacher professionalism.

Although previous studies have examined school leadership and teacher professionalism, they have generally focused on specific aspects such as supervision, training, professional guidance, or competency development. Limited attention has been given to how these leadership strategies are implemented comprehensively in early childhood education institutions and how supporting and inhibiting factors affect their implementation. Therefore, this study focuses specifically on school principals' leadership strategies in developing teacher professionalism at TK Negeri Pembina 3 Pekanbaru and RA An-Nisa Pekanbaru. The involvement of two institutions provides an opportunity to examine how leadership strategies are implemented according to the conditions and needs of each institution.

Based on the above background, this study aims to describe the leadership strategies of school principals in developing teacher professionalism and to identify the supporting and inhibiting factors affecting the implementation of these strategies at TK Negeri Pembina 3 Pekanbaru and RA An-Nisa Pekanbaru.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative approach with a phenomenological research design. The qualitative approach was used to explore the phenomenon of school principals' leadership strategies in developing teacher professionalism in depth, while the phenomenological design was used to understand the experiences and meanings related to the implementation of these leadership strategies. The research was conducted at TK Negeri Pembina 3 Pekanbaru and RA An-Nisa Pekanbaru, Pekanbaru, Riau. The research was carried out from February to May 2026.

The subjects of this study consisted of two school principals as the main informants, namely the principal of TK Negeri Pembina 3 Pekanbaru and the principal of RA An-Nisa Pekanbaru. Teachers from both institutions were involved as supporting informants. The object of the study was the leadership strategies of school principals in developing teacher professionalism, including the forms and implementation of leadership strategies as well as the supporting and inhibiting factors affecting their implementation. Informants were selected using purposive sampling based on their direct involvement in the implementation of leadership strategies and their ability to provide relevant information related to the research focus.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, observation, and documentation. Interviews were conducted with the two principals as the main informants and teachers as supporting informants to obtain in-depth information about leadership strategies, as well as the supporting and inhibiting factors in their implementation. Observations were conducted to examine the actual conditions and activities related to the implementation of leadership strategies, interactions between principals and teachers, and the work environment supporting teacher professional development. Documentation was used to complement the interview and observation data, including school work programs, supervision schedules, teacher data, meeting minutes, and photographs of activities related to teacher professional development.

The data were analyzed qualitatively and continuously throughout the research process. The analysis consisted of three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Data reduction involved selecting, focusing, simplifying, and organizing information obtained from interviews, observations, and documentation according to the research focus. The reduced data were then presented narratively and systematically to identify patterns, relationships, and emerging findings. Conclusions were drawn through careful interpretation of the presented data and repeated verification by comparing information from different sources.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Leadership Strategies in Developing Teacher Professionalism

The findings show that the principals of TK Negeri Pembina 3 Pekanbaru and RA An-Nisa Pekanbaru implemented several interconnected strategies to develop teacher professionalism. The strategies identified through interviews, observations, and documentation consisted of continuous academic supervision, motivation and encouragement, competency development through training and professional development activities, and effective communication and collaboration between principals and teachers. These strategies were not implemented separately but were integrated into the daily management and professional development of teachers.

Table 1. Leadership Strategies for Developing Teacher Professionalism

No	Leadership Strategy	Main Implementation
1	Continuous academic supervision	Classroom observation, feedback, guidance, and discussion
2	Motivation and encouragement	Encouragement to pursue further education, certification, training, and professional development
3	Competency development	Training, seminars, learning communities, and KKG activities
4	Communication and collaboration	Discussion, consultation, openness, togetherness, and joint decision-making

The four strategies identified in the study are summarized in Table 1. The findings indicate that the development of teacher professionalism was approached through supervision, motivation, competency development, and interpersonal relationships. This pattern shows that principal leadership was directed not only toward monitoring teachers' work but also toward providing opportunities and support for continuous professional growth.

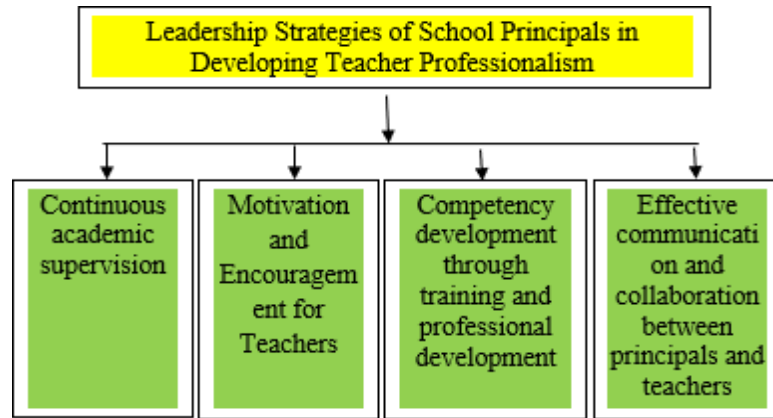


Figure 1. Leadership Strategies of School Principals in Developing Teacher Professionalism

Continuous Academic Supervision

Continuous academic supervision was one of the main strategies used by the principals to support teacher professionalism. At TK Negeri Pembina 3 Pekanbaru, supervision was conducted both according to a predetermined schedule and without prior notification. The principal directly observed classroom learning activities and provided opportunities for teachers to request supervision when they needed feedback on their teaching practices.

The findings further show that supervision was not limited to classroom observation. After the observation, the principal provided direction and discussed the learning process with the teacher. Teachers were able to identify weaknesses in their teaching and use the feedback to improve subsequent learning activities. Similar experiences were reported by teachers at RA An-Nisa, who stated that supervision helped them recognize aspects of learning that still needed improvement.

These findings indicate that academic supervision functioned as a developmental process rather than merely an administrative control mechanism. The supervision process provided teachers with direct feedback regarding their classroom practices and created an opportunity for reflection and improvement. This finding is consistent with Antoni (2020), who explains that academic supervision can serve as a means of teacher guidance, evaluation, and professional development.

Motivation and Encouragement for Teachers

The second strategy involved providing motivation and encouragement to teachers. The principal of TK Negeri Pembina 3 Pekanbaru provided motivation according to the conditions and needs of individual teachers. Motivation could be delivered in a gentle manner, while firmer direction was provided when necessary. The principal also encouraged teachers to improve their educational qualifications, pursue undergraduate education, obtain certification, and participate in professional development activities.

The findings suggest that motivation was also expressed through the principal's personal example and commitment to continuous improvement. The principal emphasized the importance of teachers becoming more capable and continuing to develop their abilities. Thus, motivation was not limited to verbal encouragement but was accompanied by practical support for teachers' professional growth.

The same general pattern was also found at RA An-Nisa, where teachers received encouragement to participate in training, KKG activities, and other professional development programs. The support provided by the principal created opportunities for teachers to increase their knowledge and skills.

This finding indicates that principal motivation can operate through both interpersonal encouragement and institutional support. When teachers receive encouragement together with opportunities for professional development, professional growth becomes part of the school's ongoing activities rather than an individual responsibility of teachers alone.

Competency Development Through Training and Professional Development

The third strategy was competency development through training and other professional development activities. The findings show that teachers from the two institutions participated in seminars, training programs, learning communities, and KKG activities. At TK Negeri Pembina 3 Pekanbaru, teachers reported that these activities provided new knowledge and encouraged them to evaluate and improve their classroom practices.

An important finding was that the principal also positioned herself as a continuous learner. The principal of TK Negeri Pembina 3 Pekanbaru explained that she first studied developments in curriculum and education and then shared the knowledge with teachers. This approach positioned professional development as a shared learning process between the principal and teachers rather than as a one-way process of instruction. Teachers also reported changes after participating in professional development activities. Training encouraged them to evaluate whether learning activities were sufficiently interesting for children and to become more creative in managing classroom learning. At RA An-Nisa, teachers similarly received encouragement from the principal to participate in training and professional development activities.

These findings demonstrate that professional development activities provided teachers with opportunities to update their knowledge and develop practical skills. In the context of early childhood education, such development is particularly relevant because teachers need to respond to children's diverse learning needs and to changes in curriculum and educational practices.

Communication and Collaboration Between Principals and Teachers

The fourth strategy was the development of effective communication and collaboration. At TK Negeri Pembina 3 Pekanbaru, the principal emphasized togetherness and a family-like working relationship as an initial foundation for developing teacher professionalism. Communication was maintained through discussion, consultation, openness, and opportunities for teachers to express their opinions and concerns.

The findings show that teachers were involved in discussions concerning school programs and were given opportunities to provide suggestions and feedback. Such communication created a more harmonious working relationship between principals and teachers. Similar patterns were identified through interviews with teachers from both institutions, who described the importance of openness, discussion, and cooperation in responding to problems and improving learning practices.

This finding suggests that professional development is supported by the quality of relationships within the school. Communication enables principals to understand teachers' needs and difficulties, while collaboration allows teachers to participate in solving problems and implementing school programs. The finding is also consistent with Wahjosumidjo (2010), who emphasizes the importance of communication and cooperation between school principals and teachers in supporting participation and responsibility within schools.

Supporting Factors in the Implementation of Leadership Strategies

The study identified four main factors supporting the implementation of principal leadership strategies: cooperation and togetherness within the school, student needs that encourage teachers to continue learning, solidarity among teachers, and the availability of facilities supporting learning and professional development.

Table 2. Supporting Factors in Teacher Professional Development

No	Supporting Factors	Contribution to Professional Development
1	Contribution to Professional Development	Supports joint implementation of school programs
2	Student needs	Encourages teachers to continue learning and improving competence
3	Teacher solidarity	Provides peer support in carrying out professional activities
4	Supporting Facilities	Facilitates learning activities and professional development

Cooperation and togetherness were particularly evident at TK Negeri Pembina 3 Pekanbaru. The principal explained that decisions were discussed with teachers and that school members shared responsibility for advancing the institution. This collaborative environment supported the implementation of programs related to teacher professional development.

Student needs also encouraged teachers to continue developing their competencies. One teacher explained that teachers need to keep learning because children's needs are diverse, including situations involving children with special needs. This indicates that professional development was not only driven by formal school programs but also by teachers' responses to the needs of their students.

In addition, teacher solidarity and adequate facilities contributed to creating an environment that supported professional development. The availability of facilities was reported as helpful for teachers in carrying out learning activities and participating in professional development programs.

Inhibiting Factors in Teacher Professional Development

Although the principals implemented various strategies, the study also identified several factors that could limit the development of teacher professionalism. These included family responsibilities and limited time, teachers' welfare and personal conditions, limited funding for learning activities, and difficulties in adapting to changes in education.

Table 3. Inhibiting Factors in Teacher Professional Development

No	Inhibiting Factors	Effect on Professional Development
1	Family responsibilities and limited time	Limits teachers' participation in education and professional development
2	Welfare and personal conditions	May affect motivation and opportunities for professional development
3	Limited funding	Restricts the provision of learning equipment and other resources
4	Difficulty adapting to educational changes	Requires additional time, guidance, and continuous support

Family responsibilities and limited time were particularly evident when teachers were encouraged to continue their education. Some teachers initially experienced difficulties because they had to divide their time between work, further education, and family responsibilities. The principal attempted to address this situation by providing support and facilitating opportunities for teachers to continue their education.

Teachers' welfare and personal conditions were also identified as factors affecting their opportunities and readiness to participate in professional development activities. This finding indicates that teacher professionalism is influenced not only by institutional programs but also by the individual circumstances of teachers.

Another constraint was limited funding for learning equipment, particularly educational play equipment and other learning needs. Both TK Negeri Pembina 3 Pekanbaru and RA An-Nisa experienced challenges related to the availability of funds for supporting learning facilities.

Finally, some teachers experienced difficulties in adapting to changes in curriculum, learning methods, and educational technology. The principal of RA An-Nisa explained that some teachers were accustomed to previous ways of working and therefore needed time to adjust to new developments. The findings indicate that adaptation requires continuous guidance and support rather than immediate changes in practice.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the leadership strategies implemented by the principals of TK Negeri Pembina 3 Pekanbaru and RA An-Nisa Pekanbaru in developing teacher professionalism consisted of continuous academic supervision, motivation and encouragement, competency development through training and professional development activities, and effective communication and collaboration between principals and teachers. These strategies were implemented according to the conditions and needs of each institution and supported teachers in continuously improving their professional competencies. The implementation of these strategies was supported by cooperation and togetherness within the school environment, teacher commitment to continuous development, peer support, professional development activities, and adequate facilities.

The implementation of teacher professional development was also influenced by several inhibiting factors, including teachers' limited time due to family responsibilities, welfare and personal conditions, limited funding for learning activities and facilities, and difficulties in adapting to changes in curriculum, learning methods, and educational developments. Therefore, continuous support from school principals is needed through appropriate supervision, motivation, professional development opportunities, and communication that considers the conditions and needs of teachers. These efforts can help sustain the development of teacher professionalism in both institutions.

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