

# The Role of Principal Leadership in Enhancing Teachers' Performance to Build 21<sup>st</sup> Century Student Character in Elementary School

Sri Marmoah<sup>1</sup>, Dea Pangesti<sup>2</sup>, Ratna Widya Irmayanti<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1,2,3</sup> Elementary School Teacher Education, Universitas Sebelas Maret, Surakarta, Indonesia  
 Corresponding author, email: marmuah@staff.uns.ac.id

## Keywords

1st keyword

2nd keyword

3rd keyword

## Abstract

Teacher competence and performance are crucial factors in shaping students' character to prepare them for the challenges of the 21st century. This study aims to describe the role of principal leadership in improving teacher performance to develop student character in response to these challenges in elementary schools. This study employs a qualitative descriptive method. The subjects of the study include 30 principals and 89 teachers in Wonogiri Regency. Data were collected through questionnaires, interviews, and literature reviews. The data were analyzed using the interactive model analysis technique by Miles and Huberman. The results indicate that principal leadership significantly influences teacher performance. In Wonogiri Regency, both principal leadership and teacher performance are categorized as excellent. Outstanding teacher performance contributes to building students' character, equipping them to face 21st-century challenges. This is because teachers play a direct role in the learning process, including the stages of planning, implementation, and assessment. This study concludes that principal leadership plays a critical role in enhancing teacher performance by motivating, encouraging, supporting, and guiding teachers. This improvement in teacher performance directly impacts the learning process and fosters the development of student character, preparing them to meet the demands of the 21st century.

## 1. Introduction

The progress of a nation is closely linked to the quality of its human resources. Education plays a critical role in improving and developing the quality of human resources, which in turn drives national development (Assadi, Murad, and Khalil 2019). Several developed countries use education as a means to advance their national development agenda. Education fosters the creation of intelligent, democratic, and open human resources (Matitaputty & Sopacua, 2023). In the 21st century, which is marked by rapid technological, economic, and cultural changes, human resources must continually adapt to remain competitive (Mardhiyah et al., 2021). These changes necessitate the development of critical thinking, problem-solving, and creative thinking skills to equip individuals with the capacity to respond to evolving societal demands (Zubaidah, 2019).

Responsive, flexible, and relevant learning models are essential to meet the challenges of the 21st century. Such learning models address diverse student needs, learning styles, and paces while providing meaningful insights into global issues, economics, and cultural transformations (Ni'mah et al., 2021). When learning is relevant to students' lives, it enhances their motivation and engagement (Jaya et al., 2023). This approach requires a shift from traditional methods to more dynamic, student-centered pedagogies that empower learners to thrive in an ever-changing world.

A pivotal factor in realizing effective learning is teacher performance. Teacher performance encompasses planning, managing, and assessing student learning outcomes. It reflects the teacher's ability to deliver quality education and directly influences the success of independent learning initiatives (Sriadmitum et al., 2023; Sumual et al., 2023). Teacher performance is shaped by internal factors such as motivation, professional competence, and educational background, as well as external factors including leadership, infrastructure, and curriculum (Astuti and Noor 2023).

One of the key external factors affecting teacher performance is the leadership of the school principal. Effective principal leadership involves guiding, directing, and supporting teachers to achieve educational goals (Nirmawati et al., 2023). Principals play a crucial role in fostering a positive work climate, encouraging professional development, and providing the necessary resources for effective teaching (Hadiansyah and Sofyan 2023). The principal's ability to motivate and mentor teachers significantly impacts the overall learning environment and student outcomes.

However, the current competency levels of school principals in Indonesia remain a concern. Data from the Ministry of Education and Culture indicate that the national average for principal competency assessments is 56.37, with the highest score of 61.47 recorded in DI

Yogyakarta (Palettei, Sulfemi, and Yusfitriadi 2021). Low principal competence can negatively impact teacher performance, subsequently affecting the achievement of learning objectives (Munawar and Jalaluddin 2021). Principals who provide clear guidance, effective supervision, and motivational support are more likely to foster environments where teachers excel and students achieve optimal learning outcomes (Romadhon & Zulela, 2021).

Teacher performance is critical in shaping student character and preparing them for the demands of the 21st century. Teachers must possess comprehensive knowledge, skills, and values to guide students effectively. This includes the ability to design character-based learning tools, implement innovative teaching methods, and serve as role models for students (Sugara & Mutmainnah, 2020). Effective principal leadership, combined with strong teacher performance, is essential for fostering student character development and ensuring students are equipped to navigate future challenges (Bessie, Nadeak, and Naibaho 2023).

The novelty of this study lies in its exploration of the relationship between principal leadership and teacher performance in shaping student character to meet 21st-century challenges. The study seeks to answer the following research questions: "How does principal leadership influence teacher performance in fostering student character to face 21st-century challenges?" and "What leadership strategies do principals employ to enhance teacher performance in this context?" The primary objective is to describe the role and leadership strategies of school principals in improving teacher performance and fostering student character in elementary schools.

## 2. Methods

This study employs a descriptive qualitative method. Descriptive qualitative research focuses on investigating factual phenomena such as events, experiences, and real-life situations (Turale 2020). The subjects of this study were principals and teachers in Wonogiri Regency, involving 30 principals and 89 teachers. Data were collected through literature review and questionnaires. The literature review involved searching and analyzing various sources, including books, journals, and other publications related to the research topic, to produce a comprehensive understanding of a particular issue (Sugiyono, 2022). This technique was used to explore the role and leadership strategies of principals in improving teacher performance and fostering students' character development to meet the challenges of the 21st century, based on journal references. The questionnaire method was used to collect data on the role of principal leadership and teacher performance, providing additional support and validation for the literature review findings. The questionnaire adopted the Guttman scale, which requires respondents to provide definitive answers of either "Yes" or "No" (Sugiyono, 2023).

**Table 1. Assessment criteria using Guttman Scale**

Percentage (%)	Category
81-100	Excellent
61-80	Good
41-60	Enough
21-40	Not Enough
0-21	Very less

*Source: Syamanta and Marbu, 2023*

## 3. Result and Discussion

### 3.1 The Role of Principal Leadership to Enhance Teacher Performance

Based on the results of interviews with school principals and teachers in Wonogiri, findings were obtained regarding the role of school principals in improving teacher performance. The principal facilitates and supports the development of teacher competencies on an ongoing basis through training, workshops, and mentoring programs. In addition, the principal actively motivates teachers by providing encouragement, appreciation, and opportunities to improve competence. As communicators, school principals maintain effective communication through regular meetings, face-to-face discussions, and implementing an open-door policy. Principals also play a role in building a collaborative work environment, supporting teacher well-being, and encouraging a work-life balance. Furthermore, school principals encourage learning innovations, such as the application of project-based learning and the integration of technology in the learning process. To ensure the improvement of learning quality, school principals routinely evaluate, collect feedback, and monitor student learning outcomes as a basis for continuous improvement.

The result of principal interview with the respondent code R4 states that:

“I prioritize professional development through regular training, workshops, and mentoring programs. We facilitate subject-specific workshops and peer learning sessions where teachers share best practices. I also conduct classroom observations followed by personalized feedback to help teachers refine their instructional techniques. Additionally, we provide ongoing coaching to support teachers in implementing innovative pedagogical methods.” (5 Dec 2024)

“Effective communication is essential. I hold regular staff meetings to discuss school goals, address concerns, and share updates. I also maintain an open-door policy to ensure teachers feel heard and supported. Additionally, I use digital communication platforms to facilitate ongoing dialogue and ensure timely information dissemination” (5 Dec 2024)

“Creating a supportive and collaborative culture is crucial. We organize team-building activities and encourage cross-grade collaboration. I also ensure that teachers have access to the resources they need to succeed. In addition, I prioritize teacher well-being through stress management workshops and providing a healthy work-life balance.” (5 Dec 2024)

The principal's leadership behavior positively influences teacher professionalism. Principals' instructional leadership behaviors positively can influence teachers' professional learning by fostering teacher leadership behaviors . The better the school leadership, the better the teacher's performance, which in turn positively impacts students' character development during the learning process (Mutohar, Trisnantari, and Masduki 2021). Teacher competence also significantly affects teacher performance and higher competence leads to improved performance (Dhani et al., 2024).

Leadership roles, such as fostering effective teamwork and creating a conducive and positive environment, directly influence teacher performance. In turn, good teacher performance contributes to the success of student learning (Mayasari, Arafat, and Setiawan 2021). The development of students' character, skills, talents, and knowledge is directly facilitated by teachers, making teacher competence and performance crucial in implementing appropriate learning strategies to address 21st-century challenges (Nurhidayat et al. 2024).

This finding aligns with research conducted by Dwapatesty Eldasisca et al., which indicates a significant relationship between teacher personality competence and the improvement of student character. Teachers must possess four essential competencies such as personality, pedagogical, professional, and social to effectively shape student character and prepare them for 21st-century challenges (Eldasisca et al., 2022). Moreover, the encouragement and support provided by school principals play a critical role in enhancing teacher performance. This enhanced performance subsequently influences student learning outcomes, particularly in character development, through the application of innovative teaching methods and media to meet the demands of the 21st century (Zubaedah et al., 2024).

The findings from the literature review are supported by data on the role of principal leadership in teacher performance. The following section presents the results of a questionnaire conducted among 30 principals in Wonogiri Regency:

**Table 2. Principal Leadership Role Data**

No	Indicator	Presentation	Category
1.	Be optimistic	100%	Excellent
2.	Communicate actively	100%	Excellent
3.	Able to lead towards excellence	100%	Excellent
4.	Communicate clearly	100%	Excellent
5.	Motivating teachers	100%	Excellent
6.	Becoming a visionary	100%	Excellent
7.	Reliable	100%	Excellent
8.	Focus on the goal	100%	Excellent
9.	Have a positive attitude	100%	Excellent
10.	Dare to take risks	96.7%	Excellent
11.	Empowering others	93.3%	Excellent

Data from the results of the teacher performance questionnaire in Wonogiri Regency involving 89 elementary school teachers, as follows:

**Table .Teacher Performance Data**

No	Indicator	Average Percentage	Category
1.	Pedagogical competence	98.3%	Excellent
2.	Personality competency	99.6%	Excellent
3.	Social competence	100%	Excellent
4.	Professional competence	94.3%	Excellent

Good school leadership plays a crucial role in enhancing teacher performance. Effective principal leadership can motivate teachers, ultimately improving their performance. The better the principal's leadership, the higher the quality of teacher performance. Teachers who feel satisfied, valued, and supported are more motivated to deliver their best efforts, resulting in improved performance (Hartinah et al. 2020). The principal's leadership role includes motivating teachers, providing recognition and rewards, encouraging professional development, and offering guidance to optimize teacher performance in the learning process, thereby achieving learning objectives (Maknun et al., 2023). Furthermore, effective leadership involves open communication with the school community, organizing regular meetings, providing instructional guidance, and conducting classroom observations (Sasmita and Endang 2023).

**3.2 The Principal Leadership Strategies to Enhance Teacher Performance**

Based on the results of the interview, the strategy carried out by the principal includes several important aspects. First, the principal organizes training and mentoring through regular training, workshops, and special guidance to increase teacher capacity. Second, school principals provide awards, incentives, and promotion opportunities for outstanding teachers as an effort to increase intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Third, the principal provides discussion forums, monthly meetings, and digital platforms to effectively maintain the flow of two-way communication. Fourth, in order to improve collaboration and teacher welfare, school principals routinely hold team-building activities to strengthen relationships between educators and create a harmonious work environment.

The result of principal interview with the respondent code R3 states that:

"I hold monthly meetings where teachers can share their ideas and discuss challenges. Besides face-to-face discussions, I utilize digital platforms to facilitate ongoing communication, ensuring that everyone stays informed and involved in school decision-making." (12 Dec 2024)

"To build a collaborative culture, I organize team-building activities. These activities not only strengthen relationships among educators but also provide a supportive environment where teachers feel valued. I also prioritize teacher well-being by offering stress management workshops and promoting a healthy work-life balance." (12 Dec 2024)

The result of principal interview with the respondent code R5 states that:

"I provide continuous professional development through training and mentoring. This includes regular workshops on curriculum innovation, as well as individualized coaching to help teachers improve their teaching practices." (3 Dec 2024)

"I maintain open communication through various channels, including regular staff meetings and online forums. This ensures that teachers can express their concerns, provide input, and stay connected with school policies and objectives." (3 Dec 2024)

The result of principal interview with the respondent code R1 states that:

"I offer awards and incentives for outstanding teachers. Each semester, I recognize exemplary performance through certificates of appreciation and financial bonuses." (29 Nov 2024)

The principal's leadership strategy to enhance teacher performance and foster student character in response to 21st-century challenges can be implemented through professional development initiatives such as training, workshops, and mentoring. Additionally, creating a positive work environment, providing performance support, and supervising teacher activities are vital aspects of this strategy. Other effective leadership practices include offering coaching, performance evaluations, motivation, and rewards to sustain and improve teacher performance (Vienty and Feska, 2022).

High-quality teacher performance directly impacts the quality of learning, which in turn shapes student character to meet the competencies required in the 21st century (Herlina et al., 2020). Effective principal leadership is essential in supporting teachers to develop pedagogical,

personality, social, and professional competencies. These competencies are crucial for fostering 21st-century learning environments where students are encouraged to communicate, collaborate, think critically, solve problems, and demonstrate creativity and innovation (Timan et al., 2022).

Achieving optimal teacher performance in the learning process can be facilitated through student-centered approaches. This includes encouraging active student participation, creating a diverse learning environment, applying team-based learning, aligning learning materials with student needs, and engaging all sensory modalities in the learning process (Ratnawati and Septi 2021).

#### 4. Conclusion

Principal leadership plays a significant role in influencing teacher performance. The better the principal's leadership, the better the teacher's performance. The data indicate that principal leadership categorized as "excellent" corresponds to teacher performance, which is also in the "excellent" category. In Wonogiri Regency, the data show that the role of principal leadership falls within the "excellent" category, aligning with the teacher performance results, which are also categorized as "excellent". Good teacher performance directly contributes to better learning outcomes, particularly in shaping student character to face the challenges of the 21st century. Teachers play a pivotal role in the learning process, encompassing planning, implementation, and assessment. Therefore, teacher performance has a substantial impact on student learning outcomes. To foster 21st-century learning, teachers must possess four core competencies such as pedagogical, personality, social, and professional. These competencies are essential in developing professional teachers who can cultivate students' abilities to communicate, collaborate, think critically, solve problems, and exhibit creativity and innovation. The results of this study can help principals as leaders to better understand how their role as leaders affects teacher performance and what strategies should be implemented. Teachers also can understand the importance of pedagogical, personality, social, and professional competencies on teacher performance and their impacts that will realize student learning outcomes, one of which is character in facing the challenges of the 21st century. This study is limited by the use of existing instruments, which may not capture all aspects of the principal's leadership strategies in depth. For further research, it is hoped that more comprehensive and refined instruments will be developed to obtain more detailed and in-depth findings.

#### Author Contributions

Sri Marmoah: Conceptualization, data curation, funding acquisition, Methodology, validation, review and editing, data Curation, formal analysis, Supervision, review and editing. Dea Pangesti: Conceptualization, writing-original draft preparation, investigation, data analysis, Ratna Widya Irmayanti: Formal analysis, Investigation; Project administration; Resources; Software; Visualization; Writing - review & editing. All authors made equal contributions to the paper. All authors have read and approved the final manuscript.

#### Reference

- Assadi Nabil, Tareq Murad, and Mahmood Khalil. 2019. "Training Teachers' Perspectives of the Effectiveness of the 'Academy-Class' Training Model on Trainees' Professional Development." *Theory and Practice in Language Studies* 9(2):137–45. doi: 10.17507/tpls.0902.03.
- Astuti Ima Puji, and Noor Miyono. 2023. "Pentingnya Gaya Kepemimpinan Kepala Sekolah Terhadap Peningkatan Kinerja Guru SD NEgeri Medono." *Jurnal Ilmiah PGSD FKIP Universitas Mandiri* 9(5):3978–3987.
- Bessie Esther, Bernadetha Nadeak, and Lamhot Naibaho. 2023. "Merancang Kurikulum Pendidikan Agama Kristen Milenial (Menjawab Tuntutan Kecakapan Abad 21 Di Era Milenial)." *Journal on Education* 05(02):3052–64.
- Hadiansyah Yadi, and Sofyan Iskandar. 2023. "Peran Kepemimpinan Kepala Sekolah Di Sekolah Dasar dalam Konteks Pendidikan Di Abad 21." *Naturalistic: Jurnal Kajian dan Penelitian Pendidikan Dan Pembelajaran* 7(2):1610–16. doi: 10.35568/naturalistic.v7i2.3364.

- Hartinah Sitti, et al. 2020. "Teacher's Performance Management: The Role of Principal's Leadership, Work Environment and Motivation in Tegal City, Indonesia." *Management Science Letters* 10(1):235-46. doi: 10.5267/j.msl.2019.7.038.
- Herlina, Happy Fitria, and Yenni Puspita. 2020. "Pengaruh Kepemimpinan Kepala Sekolah dan Kompensasi terhadap Kinerja Guru." *Journal of Education Research*, 1(3):276-82.
- Jaya Hendra, Muh. Hambali, and Fakhrurozi. 2023. "Transformasi Pendidikan : Peran Pendidikan Berkelanjutan dalam Menghadapi Tantangan Abad Ke-21." *Jurnal Review Pendidikan dan Pengajaran* 6(4):2416-22.
- Mayasari Intan, Yasir Arafat, and Andi Arif Setiawan. 2021. "The Effect of Principal Leadership and Teacher Performance Toward Student Achievement." *Journal of Social Work and Science Education* 2(2):188-97. doi: 10.52690/jswse.v2i2.249.
- Munawa, and Jalaluddin. 2021. "Kepemimpinan Kepala Sekolah Dalam Meningkatkan Kinerja Guru SMP Negeri 3 Bireuen." *JURNAL HURRIAH: Jurnal Evaluasi Pendidikan Dan Penelitian* 2(2):14-21. doi: 10.56806/jh.v2i2.14.
- Mutohar Prim Masrokan, Hikmah Eva Trisnantari, and Masduki. 2021. "The Effect of Principal Leadership Behavior, Teacher Model, and School Culture on Student' Character in Adapting to the Global Environment." *Asian Social Science and Humanities Research Journal (ASHREJ)* 3(2):36-42. doi: 10.37698/ashrej.v3i2.78.
- Ni'mah, Dina Zahrotun, Evi Chamalah, and Aida Azizah. 2021. "Fleksibilitas Dan Aksesibilitas Digitalisasi pembelajaran Bahasa dan Sastra Indonesia di Masa Pandemi." *Jurnal Ilmiah Semantika* 03(01):84-90.
- Nirmawati, Sri Nurabdiah Pratiwi, and Irvan. 2023. "The Effect of Principal Leadership on Teacher Performance through Work Motivation as an Intervening at Private Vocational Schools in Medan Tuntungan District". *Indonesian Journal of Education & Mathematical Science* 4(2): 73- 80.
- Nurhidayat Eka, Januarius Mujiyanto, Issy Yuliasri, and Rudi Hartono. 2024. "Technology Integration and Teachers' Competency in the Development of 21st-Century Learning in EFL Classroom." *Journal of Education and Learning* 18(2):342-49. doi: 10.11591/edulearn.v18i2.21069.
- Palettei Arsyad Djamaluddin, Wahyu Bagja Sulfemi, and Yusfitriadi. 2021. "Tingkat Pemahaman Kepala Sekolah, Guru, Dan Komite Sekolah Terhadap Implementasi Standar Pengelolaan Pendidikan Di Sekolah Dasar." *Jurnal Pendidikan Dan Kebudayaan* 6(1):38-53. doi: 10.24832/jpnk.v6i1.1592.
- Ratnawati, and Septi Gumindari. 2021. "Profil Guru Profesional Abad 21 Dalam Perspektif Mahasiswa Iain Syekh Nurjati Cirebon." *AL-TARBIYAH: Jurnal Pendidikan (The Educational Journal)* 31(1):27. doi: 10.24235/ath.v31i1.8493.
- Romadhon Muhamad and Zulela MS. 2021. "Pengaruh Kepemimpinan Kepala Sekolah Terhadap Kinerja Guru." *Journal of Innovation in Teaching and Instructional Media* 1(3):218-25. doi: 10.52690/jitim.v1i3.852.
- Sasmita Saepudin Karta, and Endang Prastini. 2023. "Peran Kepemimpinan Kepala Sekolah Dalam Meningkatkan Kinerja Guru." *Jurnal Pendidikan Kewarganegaraan Dan Politik* 1(1):11-17. doi: 10.61476/167tvg21.
- Sriadmitum Ike, Sudarno, and Nyoto. 2023. "Leadership Style, Work Environment, and Compensation on Job Satisfaction and Teacher Performance." *Journal of Applied Business and Technology* 4(1):79-92. doi: 10.35145/jabt.v4i1.122.
- Sugiyono. 2023. "Metode Penelitian Pendidikan (Kuantitatif, Kualitatif, Kombinasi, R&D, dan Penelitian Pendidikan." Bandung: Penerbit Alfabeta.
- Sumual Shelty D. M., Paulus Tuerah, Henny B. A. Kiriweno, and Dafrosa Pandey. 2023. "Persepsi Kepala Sekolah Terhadap Kompetensi Guru Dalam Proses Pembelajaran Kurikulum Merdeka Belajar." *Jurnal Ilmiah Wahana Pendidikan* 9(9):717-22.
- Timan Agus, Mustiningsih and Ali Imron. 2022. "Digital Leadership Kepala Sekolah Hubungannya dengan Kinerja Guru dan Kompetensi Siswa Era Abad 21." *Jurnal Administrasi dan Manajemen Pendidikan* 5(4):323-333.
- Turale Sue. 2020. "A Brief Introduction to Qualitative Description: A Research Design Worth Using." *Pacific Rim International Journal of Nursing Research* 24(3):289-91.
- Vienty Okta, and Feska Ajepri. 2022. "Strategi Kepala Sekolah Dalam Meningkatkan Kinerja Guru." *MindSet: Jurnal Manajemen Pendidikan Islam* 1(September):h. 131.
- Zubaedah, Ojat Darajat, and Sri Dewi Nirmala. 2024. "Hubungan Peran Kepala Sekolah sebagai Pemimpin Pembelajaran dengan Kinerja Guru Sekolah Dasar dalam Mengembangkan Pembelajaran Abad 21." *Jurnal Ilmiah Pendidikan Dasar* 9(3): 423-435.
- Zubaidah Siti .2019. "Pendidikan Karakter Terintegrasi Keterampilan Abad Ke-21." *Jurnal Penelitian dan Pengkajian Ilmu Pendidikan: E-Saintika* 3(2):1-24.