

## PRINCIPAL'S MANAGERIAL STRATEGY: OPTIMIZING THE ROLE OF THE LEARNING COMMUNITY IN IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AT SDN 1 KALIPANG

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### ABSTRACT

SDN 1 Kalipang has actively implemented Learning Communities, resulting in improved performance on the educational report card over the last three years. This study aims to describe and analyze the principal's strategic and operational roles in managing Learning Communities to improve learning quality at SDN 1 Kalipang. Using a qualitative case study design, data were collected through in-depth interviews with principals and teachers, observations of Learning Community activities, and documentation analysis. The findings indicate that the principal demonstrates comprehensive leadership. Strategically, the principal positions Learning Communities as a priority program aligned with the school's vision. Operationally, the principal facilitates collaborative routines, ensures resource allocation, and creates a supportive culture for teachers. The study concludes that the principal's managerial strategy—both strategic and operational—significantly enhances the effectiveness of Learning Communities as a collaborative mechanism for improving learning quality.

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## INTRODUCTION

Learning quality represents a critical indicator of educational system effectiveness. In the context of basic education, particularly elementary schools (SD), the demand to create innovative, relevant, and student centered learning environments is increasing with the implementation of new curricula (e.g., the Independent Curriculum). However, the reality on the ground often demonstrates the challenges of Teacher Competency Gaps and Professional

Isolation. Teachers frequently work in isolation, which restricts opportunities to exchange best practices and collaboratively solve instructional challenges and solve problems together. These challenges directly impact student learning engagement and the achievement of optimal learning outcomes. This is consistent with findings by Nurjanah & Pujianto (2021), Widiastuti & Budi (2023), and Susanti (2023), who stated that successful collaboration depends heavily on the active role of the principal, not just on structure. Weak managerial support (such as allocation of time and facilities) reduces teacher efficacy, which is a major obstacle to active participation in Learning Communities or Teacher Working Groups (KKG).

Therefore, systematic and sustained efforts are needed to develop teachers' professional capacity to adapt to pedagogical changes and improve their teaching effectiveness. One solution offered through Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) has been globally recognized as an effective strategy for fostering school-based teacher professional development. Learning Communities serve as a reflective collaborative platform where teachers regularly meet to analyze student learning outcomes, design more effective learning, conduct peer observations, and share best practices (Ramadhan, 2021).

However, the success of a Learning Community depends heavily on the support and strategic direction of school leadership. The principal plays a central role as an instructional and managerial leader. The principal's managerial strategies (such as time allocation, resource provision, supportive policies, and the establishment of a collaborative culture) are key to determining whether the Learning Community remains merely a meeting forum or a true catalyst for significant learning change (Kusuma, 2020; Santoso & Sari, 2020; Hermawan, 2022). Without appropriate managerial strategies, the Learning Community risks failing to reach its full potential.

SDN 1 Kalipang, as an educational institution, faces similar challenges in its efforts to improve the quality of learning through Learning Communities. This study specifically examines the managerial strategies implemented by the principal, including past, ongoing, and prospective efforts by the principal of SDN 1 Kalipang. The selection of this specific location was crucial for in-depth analysis of actual practices and contextual strategies tailored to the school's resources and conditions. The Learning Community functions as a driving force for innovation, where teachers independently and collaboratively seek solutions to complex learning problems and improve their teaching practices (Ramadhan, 2021).

SDN 1 Kalipang is one of the elementary schools with A accreditation and state status located in the Sarang District, Rembang Regency. SDN 1 Kalipang has 1 principal, 6 class teachers, 2 Islamic Education and Sports teachers, 1 Library Education Personnel (Librarian), and 1 school guard education personnel. All teachers have a Bachelor's degree, and more than 50% are certified/are currently undergoing the certification process. SDN 1 Kalipang has 6 classes consisting of 90 male students and 82 female students. In 2024/2025, the school achieved many achievements. The main achievement was the increase in the achievement of the Education report card since 2023, in 2024 and 2025 there was a greater increase compared to 2023. This achievement is the impact of the implementation of the SDN 1 Kalipang Learning Community routinely and continuously.

Schools with limited resources strive to adequately facilitate Learning Communities. The principal successfully implemented an efficient managerial strategy, optimizing internal resources (asking teachers with specific expertise to become internal coaches) instead of expensive external training. The principal conducted resource mapping and empowered internal teachers, demonstrating the principal's smart strategy in overcoming budget constraints. Another observation at SDN 1 Kalipang was the principal's role in implementing a periodic audit or reflective supervision system focused on the implementation of Learning Community outcomes. The learning community at SDN 1 Kalipang shows signs of independent initiative (teachers continue to meet outside of mandatory hours) driven by mutual trust and professionalism instilled by the principal. This demonstrates the principal's success in building a safe psychological culture and shared ownership of learning improvement. The most tangible evidence is seen in SDN 1 Kalipang's 2025 educational report card achievement and its achievement in the Rembang Regency Literacy Championship.

SDN 1 Kalipang is a school that already has and actively operates a Learning Community. The principal no longer focuses on community formation, but on effectiveness and optimization through the principal's managerial strategies. Schools serve as laboratories for testing the impact of implemented Learning Communities. However, schools have teachers with varying ages and experience, requiring the principal to unify the vision of this heterogeneous Learning Community. Other challenges include tight time allocation constraints or limited professional development funding, and the curriculum transition phase, which demands a cultural shift from individualistic to collaborative. This uniqueness positions the principal as an agent of change whose strategies require analysis.

SDN 1 Kalipang Elementary School has the potential to optimize Learning Communities to improve learning quality. If successful in identifying managerial strategies to address learning quality gaps, SDN 1 Kalipang could serve as a model or best practice for other elementary schools in the region or district with similar characteristics. The novelty of this research lies in the principal's explicit and planned managerial strategy aimed at optimizing the function of Learning Communities in improving learning quality. This addresses the gaps in Learning Community implementation, particularly at SDN 1 Kalipang. These findings are crucial to ensuring that SDN 1 Kalipang can improve the quality of teacher teaching and, ultimately, student learning outcomes and competencies equitably and sustainably, not just immediately after training.

Based on the description above, a study was conducted to describe and analyze the role of the principal in the strategic and operational planning of the learning community program to support the improvement of learning quality at SDN 1 Kalipang, Sarang District, Rembang Regency. The focus of the study includes the role in strategic planning and operational planning in optimizing the Learning Community to support the improvement of learning quality.

## METHOD

This research uses a qualitative case study approach was selected to enable an in-depth understanding of the principal's leadership dynamics within an authentic school context the researcher to deeply understand the dynamics occurring within the school environment, particularly regarding how the principal carries out his or her role as a manager in improving the quality of learning by strengthening the learning community. In this study, the researcher served as the primary instrument in the process of data collection, interpretation, and analysis (Sugiyono, 2023), making this approach relevant for exploring the complexity of the principal's role in a holistic and contextual manner.

This research was conducted at SDN 1 Kalipang, a public school in Sarang District, Rembang Regency. The research took place from February to July 2025. This time period was used for data collection, analysis, and report preparation. This research used a qualitative approach with a case study design. This approach was chosen because it allowed the researcher to deeply understand the principal's leadership practices in motivating the learning community and their impact on learning quality contextually and holistically. The research steps included preparation, data collection, data analysis, and report preparation.

The research subjects were the principal, teachers as members of the learning community, and students as direct recipients of the impact. Subjects were selected using purposive sampling, which involves determining subjects based on their role and involvement in the research focus. This qualitative research employed three primary data collection techniques: in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation. These techniques were applied triangulatingly to gain in-depth and contextual understanding. Data validity in this study was tested using credibility and confirmability. Data analysis techniques were conducted continuously from the initial data collection process to final interpretation, with the aim of gaining a deeper understanding of the principal's strategy in optimizing the learning community to improve the quality of learning at SDN 1 Kalipang. The Miles-Huberman interactive analysis model was chosen because it has proven effective in recent qualitative research in the field of educational management and learning community development. This aligns with the findings of Nugroho (2022), who emphasized the importance

of a continuous analysis cycle to produce in-depth and valid findings. The data analysis stages used included data collection, data condensation, data presentation, and drawing conclusions and reflection.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The principal's role in building and driving a Learning Community at school is vital and encompasses both strategic and operational dimensions (Hidayati, 2023; Putri & Saputra, 2024; Nurhidayah, 2024). A Learning Community is a collaborative platform for teachers and education staff to learn together, share good practices, and address learning challenges to improve the quality of student learning outcomes (Suryana, 2022; Hidayati, 2023).

Strategic planning involves determining long-term directions and allocating resources that support the school's instructional vision and allocating resources that support the school's vision (Wulandari & Susilo, 2021; Haq & Haq, 2023). This study focuses on the strategic planning role, including vision, mission, and goals; resource provision; team formation; and strengthening a culture of collaboration (Sekar, 2020; Kartika, 2020; Ramdhani, 2021; Fitriyani, 2023; Puspitasari, 2023). Interviews with principals and teachers (March 10-25, 2025) indicate that principals formulate and articulate a vision that explicitly incorporates a collaborative learning culture and improves the quality of learning through Learning Communities. Principals ensure that objectives align with the school's vision and student learning outcome data (such as educational report cards).

In terms of resource provision, interviews indicate that principals play a strategic role in adequately allocating budget, time, and facilities (meeting rooms, ICT equipment, reference materials). This ensures that Learning Communities can operate routinely and effectively, rather than simply as ceremonial activities. These findings align with the findings of Santoso & Sari (2020); Kartika (2020); and Pratama (2022), who examined key components of principals' managerial strategies that support Learning Communities, including allocating resources and time, providing sustainability mechanisms, and identifying teacher needs in line with school development programs.

In implementing Learning Communities, principals strategically form small teams to drive the community, consisting of highly committed, high-potential teachers with facilitation skills. This team is tasked with assisting in the planning and implementation of the program on an ongoing basis. The Principal leads a shift in the culture of collaboration from isolated work to a culture of sharing and learning. The school creates a safe climate for teachers to share problems, try new practices, and receive feedback without fear of judgment (Teacher Interview Results, April 3-4, 2025). The Principal, as the creator of a learning culture through the Learning Community, minimizes every challenge, even though gaps sometimes appear. The findings of Kusuma (2020); Ramashan (2021); Dewi & Putra (2022); and Hidayat (2023) show that the Principal and his team took steps to identify internal obstacles that indirectly indicate the failure of managerial strategies in facilitating this culture, indicating that the implementation of the Learning Community, which is varied and not yet standardized, must be meaningful and more structured and synchronized with the school's vision, mission, and goals.

Operational planning focuses on the concrete steps and details of the day-to-day implementation of the Learning Community program. Role dimensions are constructed from several related studies and established as dimensions in operational planning. These dimensions include initiation and facilitation, mentoring and monitoring, professional development support, and evaluation and reflection (Hadi, 2020; Larasati, 2020; Hermawan, 2022; Mulyana, 2022; Susanti, 2023; Setiawan & Utami, 2023).

Interviews with the Learning Community Mobilization Team (April 7-8, 2026) indicated that the principal facilitates regular meetings by ensuring a clear schedule and effective discussion mechanisms. The principal actively participates in each meeting, assisting teachers, and ensuring that activities focus on solving student learning problems or improving teacher competency. Monitoring is conducted to identify obstacles and provide appropriate support. The principal operationally encourages and facilitates teachers to participate in relevant training such as IHT, webinars, or modules in PMM, and then ensures that the training outcomes are implemented and shared within the Community.



Periodic evaluations are conducted to assess the program's effectiveness, assessing the extent to which teacher competency has improved and its impact on student learning outcomes. These evaluation results are used as reflection material for developing the next program (a continuous improvement cycle).

Overall, the research findings indicate that the principal, in assuming a leadership role in the learning process, focuses on the long-term vision and direction of the Learning Community, as well as concrete actions and detailed implementation of the Learning Community program, ensuring effective and efficient activities. The integration of in-depth interviews, observations, and the review of the Strategic Planning document is shown in **Table 1**.

**Table 1.** Strategic Planning Data Integration

Dimensions	Data Collection Methods	Key Findings
Strategic Planning	Interviews	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Formulation of the Learning Community's vision and mission aligned with the school's vision and learning quality improvement standards (Education Report Card results).</li> <li>2. Learning Community as a primary strategy for teacher professional development.</li> </ol>
	Documents	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. School Work Plan (RKS) and School Activity and Budget Plan (RKAS) that list Learning Community as a priority program.</li> <li>2. Decree of the Community Mobilization Team/Coordinator.</li> </ol>
	Observation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Actively disseminating the importance of Learning Community in teacher meetings and official meetings, demonstrating commitment to the program's sustainability.</li> <li>2. The Principal analyzes student learning outcome data with the team to determine the focus and priorities of the Learning Community.</li> </ol>
Analysis Conclusion	The Principal's role is strategic in setting clear and measurable Kombel goals to achieve improvements in the quality of learning.	

The integration of Operational Planning results in Optimizing Learning Communities can be seen in **Table 2**.

**Table 2.** Integration of Operational Planning Data

Dimensions	Data Collection Methods	Key Findings
Operational Planning	Interviews	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The principal facilitates the development of the Learning Community schedule and materials focused on the implementation of the Independent Curriculum, the use of PMM, or other competency development.</li> <li>2. The principal ensures the allocation of resources for snacks or the purchase of reference books, the use of school rooms/facilities, etc.</li> </ol>
	Documents	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Regular schedule of Learning Community meetings</li> </ol>

2. Minutes and Attendance List
3. Activity Report
4. Accountability Report (LPJ) on the use of funds for Learning Community activities

Dimensions	Data Collection Methods	Key Findings
	Observation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The principal consistently attends and actively facilitates scheduled Learning Community sessions, demonstrating visible instructional leadership.</li> <li>2. The principal facilitates the use of internal (competent teachers) or external resource persons.</li> <li>3. The principal acts as a motivator and coach by providing direct feedback.</li> </ol>
Analysis Conclusion	The Principal's role is operational in ensuring logistical and moral support for teachers, encouraging collaboration, and monitoring the implementation of daily Learning Community activities.	

Overall, the research findings lead to the conclusion that the Principal of SDN 1 Kalipang optimizes the Learning Community through program alignment, delegation of authority, and supervision/evaluation. The Principal aligns the Learning Community program by, among other things, connecting Community topics to real-life classroom learning issues, identified from student learning outcome data. The school provides space for teachers to lead and make decisions within the Learning Community to foster a sense of ownership. The ultimate impact of the Learning Community implementation is seen in changes to teacher lesson plans/teaching modules and improved student learning outcomes.

While there are many positive findings from the Principal's managerial strategies in optimizing the Learning Community to improve the quality of learning at SDN 1 Kalipang, there are also negative findings emerging from the analysis of interviews, observations, and documentation that reveal obstacles to the implementation of the Learning Community. Analysis of negative findings, including obstacles and challenges related to time constraints and teacher workload, is presented in **Table 3**.

**Table 3.** Obstacles and Challenges Due to Time Limitations and Teacher Workload

Negative Findings	Evidence	Impact on the Learning Community
Fatigue and Decreased Focus	Interview: Teachers stated that Kombel is often held after class (outside of effective hours), causing fatigue and decreased enthusiasm.	Time is used unproductively; discussions tend to end quickly and lack depth.
Perception of Additional Work	Interview & Observation: Teachers still view Kombel as a burdensome additional task, rather than a professional necessity integrated with their primary work.	Teachers show little initiative in bringing real-world classroom problems to the Community Learning Forum.

Conflicts with Administration	Documentation: Busy schedules for completing IKM and PMM administration reduce the time teachers should spend designing the implementation of Kombel results.	The results of Community Learning discussions cannot be fully implemented in the classroom
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Another important finding concerns weaknesses in discussion quality and internal teacher competence the quality of discussion and internal teacher competency. Challenges to discussion quality and internal teacher competency can be seen in **Table 4**.

Table 4. Challenges to Discussion Quality and Teacher Internal Competence		
Negative Findings	Evidence	Impact on the Learning Community
Lack of Real-World Problem-Based Discussions	Observation & Minutes: Discussion of some findings was theoretical or general in nature, not focused on solving specific identified problems.	The resulting solutions are not relevant or not on target to improve student achievement.
Reliance on Specific Teachers	Observation & Interviews: There was a dominant teacher (monopolistic role), while the majority of other teachers tended to be passive and merely listeners.	-

Findings on Operational Support Constraints can be seen in **Table 5**.

Table 5. Operational Support Constraints		
Negative Findings	Evidence	Impact on the Learning Community
Suboptimal Digital Facilities	Observation: School internet/Wi-Fi access is unstable or limited, hindering the use of the Merdeka Mengajar (PMM) Platform or other digital learning resources.	It hinders the use of modern resources and limits the exploration of materials that require connectivity.
Lack of Dedicated Budget	Documentation: BOS budget allocations are not specific or are often diverted to other needs, reducing the school's ability to facilitate the training or workshops required by teachers	It hinders the ability to invite expert sources or purchase supporting references.

Strategic and operational problem-solving to address negative findings can be achieved by integrating Learning Communities into effective work hours (Handayani & Anwar, 2022; Haq & Haq, 2023). Principals need to issue policies formally allocating 1-2 hours per week. Learning Community activities, as part of teachers' work hours (replacing routine collaboration/coordination hours), to demonstrate that learning is part of the job, should be directed toward producing immediately useful learning artifacts (such as differentiated Teaching Module templates and micro-

teaching videos). Therefore, activities focus on practical outputs, not documents, consistent with the findings of Kartika (2020); Dewi & Putra (2022); and Fitriyani (2023).

The Principal's strategy for improving discussion quality and internal competency involves ensuring each community session begins and ends with a discussion of student data and answers to key questions. This forces discussions to be directed and focused on problem-solving in the classroom. A facilitator rotation system and a teacher-as-coach system will enable the implementation of a monthly/per-topic facilitator rotation system. Additionally, encourage Teacher as Coach programs where teachers with specific expertise (such as ICT or Numeracy) mentor their peers, thus spreading leadership roles. Learning Communities can adopt elements of Lesson Study (planning, observation, reflection) in a structured manner (Hidayat, 2023). The Principal or Coordinator is required to follow up and provide constructive feedback on the implementation of good practices in the classroom (Hadi, 2021; Kusuma, 2023).

To improve operational support, Principals should prioritize a small portion of the School Operational Assistance (BOS) budget for increasing school internet bandwidth or providing dedicated Wi-Fi access points in the Community Service (Kombel) room to ensure smooth utilization of PMM and digital resources (priority allocation of funds for connectivity). The use of funds allocated through the BOS budget must be reported transparently and specifically for community activities.

## CONCLUSION

The study concludes that the principal of SD Negeri 1 Kalipang demonstrates comprehensive managerial leadership—both strategically and operationally—in optimizing Learning Communities as a mechanism to improve learning quality. Strategic leadership is reflected in the integration of Learning Communities into the school's vision, priority programs, and resource allocation. Operational leadership is demonstrated through routine facilitation, monitoring, coaching, and the creation of a collaborative culture that promotes teacher professionalism. However, several challenges remain, including limited teacher time, administrative workload, inconsistent participation, and infrastructural constraints. Future studies may expand the sample to multiple schools and compare different leadership models. Strengthening data-driven discussions, allocating protected time for Learning Community activities, and developing teacher-coach systems are recommended to enhance the sustainability and impact of Learning Communities.

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