

## Principal Academic Supervision in Strengthening Quality Culture at SD Negeri 021 Sungai Kunjang in the Independent Curriculum Era

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### ABSTRACT

This study aims to describe the implementation of academic supervision by school principals in strengthening the quality culture at SD Negeri 021 Sungai Kunjang. Quality culture reflects values, attitudes, and learning practices that are oriented towards improving the quality of education. This research employed a qualitative approach with descriptive methods, utilizing data collection techniques that included observation, interviews, and documentation. The results showed that principals play an active role in planning, implementing, and following up on academic supervision. Supervision is conducted through classroom visits, joint reflection, and constructive feedback to teachers. The implementation of supervision is proven to encourage teachers to improve professionalism, understand the Merdeka Curriculum, and build a collaborative culture that focuses on student learning. Follow-up activities in the form of training and developing learning communities also strengthen the school's quality culture. Although there are still obstacles such as time constraints and teacher readiness, the participatory leadership of the principal can facilitate gradual positive changes. Thus, academic supervision contributes significantly to creating an adaptive, innovative, and competitive school climate.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Basic education is the main foundation in shaping the character and competence of students. Therefore, improving the quality of education at the primary school level is a major concern in various national education policies. One of the strategic policies that is being widely implemented is the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, which requires a paradigm shift in learning and education management, including in terms of academic supervision carried out by school principals. Academic supervision is a process of mentoring, coaching, and evaluation carried out by school principals for teachers in order to improve professional competence and the quality of learning in schools (Glickman et al., 2007, in Polly & Hariyati, 2024).

In the context of implementing Merdeka Curriculum, academic supervision not only functions as a control tool but also as a coaching mechanism that can inspire teachers to develop their potential optimally. School principals are required not only as administrators, but also as learning leaders who are able to create a culture of quality in the school environment. Quality culture in schools can be understood as a shared commitment of all school members in creating and maintaining quality standards on an ongoing basis, including values, attitudes, and practices that support quality learning (Ismail, 2018, in Kurniyanti et al., 2024). In practice, a culture of quality is realized through collaboration, effective communication, and data-based decision making, all of which require strong support and leadership from the school principal. At SD Negeri 021 Sungai Kunjang, academic supervision is one of the important instruments in supporting the implementation of Merdeka Curriculum. Supervision carried out by the principal is not only oriented towards administrative assessment, but also leads to the professional development of teachers through classroom visits, reflective discussions, providing constructive feedback, and continuous training. This is in accordance with the findings of Kurniyanti et al. (2024), who showed that academic supervision conducted collaboratively with a clinical approach can improve teacher competence and strengthen the school's quality culture.

However, in practice, the implementation of academic supervision does not always run smoothly. Some of the challenges that often arise are the principal's limited time to conduct intensive coaching, teacher resistance to change, lack of understanding of the Independent Curriculum concept, and suboptimal utilization of supervision support technology such as the Merdeka Mengajar Platform (Ilham et al., 2024). This condition shows the need for a supervision strategy that is structured, sustainable, and adaptive to the dynamics of teacher needs and curriculum development. In a study conducted by Wahyuni (2023), it was found that the success of academic supervision depends on three main stages: planning, implementation, and follow-up. In the planning stage, teacher involvement in designing supervision activities is very important to foster a sense of ownership and responsibility. At the implementation stage, the supervision approach used must be in accordance with the characteristics of the teacher and learning needs. While at the follow-up stage, feedback and reinforcement are needed to encourage teachers to

continue to develop professionally. Furthermore, research by Sulandra et al. (2024) at SDN 4 Anggrek showed that academic supervision conducted with a collaborative approach and supported by planned follow-up can significantly improve learning quality and strengthen the culture of quality. In this study, principals not only conducted classroom visits but also prepared supervision reports, analyzed teachers' needs, and conducted relevant training based on the results of supervision. This shows that well-planned academic supervision can be a strategic tool to build a culture of quality in schools.

Academic supervision has also been shown to have a positive correlation with teachers' perceptions of learning quality. In a study conducted by Octavia & Hariyati (2024), it was found that positive teacher perceptions of the implementation of the principal's academic supervision had a direct impact on improving the quality of the learning process. This means that the better the supervision carried out by the principal, the higher the commitment of teachers in designing and implementing meaningful learning for students.

Meanwhile, from a policy aspect, academic supervision has been regulated in Permendiknas No. 13/2007 on School/Madrasah Principal Standards, which confirms that principals must have supervision competencies that include the ability to plan academic supervision programs, implement supervision with appropriate approaches and strategies, and follow up the results of supervision with relevant coaching programs (MoNE, 2007). However, the reality in the field shows that there are still many principals who are not optimal in carrying out this role, either because of limited training or because of the high administrative burden.

In the context of strengthening the quality culture, principals are also required to be agents of change who are able to build a shared vision, create a conducive work climate, and encourage teachers to become lifelong learners. According to Pribadi et al. (2023), principals must have the ability to motivate teachers, provide examples, and create space for teachers to experiment and innovate in learning. Academic supervision is a strategic vehicle to realize this vision through dialogue, reflection, and strengthening good practices in the school environment.

Therefore, it is important to examine in more depth how the implementation of principals' academic supervision can support the strengthening of a culture of quality, especially at SD Negeri 021 Sungai Kunjang. This research is relevant in evaluating the effectiveness of supervision that has been implemented, identifying supporting and inhibiting factors, and formulating follow-up strategies that can strengthen the culture of quality in a sustainable manner. The findings of this study are expected to serve as a reference in the development of educational policies and principals' managerial practices in the context of implementing Merdeka Curriculum.

Thus, academic supervision is not only understood as an administrative obligation, but as the heart of efforts to improve learning quality and strengthen school culture. If implemented consistently, participatively, and adaptively, academic supervision has great potential to make schools a dynamic and innovative learning organization.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Problem Formulation**

1. How is the implementation of academic supervision by the principal at SD Negeri 021 Sungai Kunjang?
2. How does academic supervision contribute to strengthening the culture of quality at SD Negeri 021 Sungai Kunjang?
3. What are the supporting and inhibiting factors in the implementation of the principal's academic supervision in strengthening the quality culture at SD Negeri 021 Sungai Kunjang?
4. What is the principal's follow-up strategy to maintain the sustainability of the quality culture through academic supervision?

### **Research Objectives**

1. To describe the implementation of academic supervision by principals at SD Negeri 021 Sungai Kunjang.
2. To analyze the contribution of academic supervision in strengthening the quality culture at SD Negeri 021 Sungai Kunjang.
3. To identify the supporting and inhibiting factors in the implementation of academic supervision by school principals in strengthening the quality culture.
4. To formulate the principal's follow-up strategy in maintaining the sustainability of the quality culture through academic supervision activities.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This research used a qualitative approach with a descriptive research type. This approach was chosen to gain an in-depth understanding of the implementation of the principal's academic supervision in strengthening the quality culture at SD Negeri 021 Sungai Kunjang. Descriptive qualitative research allows researchers to describe in detail the social reality that occurs in the field through direct data collection from the source.

### **Subjects and Research Location**

The subjects of this study were the principal, teachers, and education personnel at SD Negeri 021 Sungai Kunjang, Sungai Kunjang Subdistrict, Samarinda City. This location was chosen purposefully because the school is actively implementing academic supervision in the context of implementing the Merdeka Curriculum.

### **Data Collection Techniques**

Data collection was carried out through three main techniques, namely:

- a. In-depth interviews with principals and teachers to extract information about the implementation of academic supervision and its impact on quality culture.
- b. Participatory observation in supervision activities, including during classroom visits, learning reflections, and evaluation meetings.
- c. Documentation study of supervision documents such as supervision schedules, classroom observation notes, evaluation reports, and teachers' learning tools.

### **Research Instruments**

The main instrument in this research is the researcher himself (human instrument). To support data validity, researchers used interview guidelines, observation sheets, and document analysis formats as auxiliary instruments.

### **Data Analysis Technique**

The data obtained were analyzed using the Miles and Huberman model, which includes three stages: Data reduction, which involves filtering and sorting data that is relevant to the research focus. Data presentation involves organizing data in the form of descriptive narratives, matrices, or interview quotes. Drawing conclusions and verification, namely compiling temporary conclusions which are then verified repeatedly based on the results of observation and data triangulation.

### **Data Validity Test**

Data validity was tested through triangulation techniques, both source triangulation (comparing data from principals, teachers, and documents), technique triangulation (comparing the results of interviews, observations, and documentation), and time triangulation (repeating interviews and observations at different times).

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Implementation of Academic Supervision by the Principal**

The implementation of academic supervision at SD Negeri 021 Sungai Kunjang is carried out in a systematic and planned manner within the framework of strengthening the learning quality culture. Supervision is not only focused on evaluating teacher performance, but also emphasizes professional development based on dialogue and reflection. This is reinforced through the preparation of annual and semi-annual supervision programs that are agreed upon collectively by the principal and all teachers. In an interview with the principal at ....., it was explained that the approach taken was not top-down instructional, but collaborative:

"We agreed that supervision should not be a scourge. All teachers are involved in determining the time and form of coaching needed."

Supervision activities are organized in the form of an academic supervision calendar that includes classroom observations, individual and group reflections, and follow-up in the form of internal training. Each teacher is observed at least twice per semester. The observation sheet format uses indicators that refer to the principles of differentiated, active, and assessment-based learning, according to the characteristics of the Merdeka Curriculum.

Three main aspects are the focus of supervision, namely:

1. Lesson planning,
2. Implementation of teaching-learning activities,
3. Assessment of learning outcomes.

Post-observation discussions are conducted in a non-formal setting. Teachers are given space to convey constraints and reflections before the principal provides feedback. The written feedback format consists of three components: strengths, development areas, and strategic recommendations.

As expressed by ....., .... classroom teacher:

"He did not immediately give criticism. I was asked to tell my story first, then we matched notes. That makes me feel not supervised, but coached."

Academic supervision in this school is not just a formal agenda, but an instrument to improve teachers' professional capacity. Each teacher is treated personally and contextually based on their needs, whether they are a senior teacher, a novice teacher or an outstanding teacher.

### Teacher Supervision Results

As part of academic supervision, ten teachers were observed using 20 supervision indicators. The results of the data processing are shown below:

Table 1. Academic Supervision Results

No	Teacher Name	Total Score	Average Score	Performance Interpretation	Reinforcement Notes
1	Sri Andini	20	1.00	Very good	The variety of methods needs to be increased
2	Ety Irawati	18	0.90	Good	Need to improve learning evaluation
3	Widya Astuti	19	0.95	Good	Class management is quite good
4	Sri Sukmawati	17	0.85	Simply	Need reinforcement in the lesson plan
5	Jumiati	20	1.00	Very good	Professional and consistent
6	Pinarsih	16	0.80	Simply	Need to understand the curriculum
7	Siti Norhayati	18	0.90	Good	Effective learning strategies
8	Eni Kasmiyati	19	0.95	Good	Active learning is applied
9	Asih Nurjanah	15	0.75	Simply	Learning evaluation needs to be strengthened
10	Ayu Visga Tiara	20	1.00	Very good	Very good, just need consistency

From the data, it can be seen that:

- 30% of teachers (3 people) obtained a perfect score (1.00) and were in the Very Good category.
- 40% of teachers (4 people) were in the good category (0.90-0.95).
- 30% of teachers (3 people) were in the Fair category (0.75-0.85), indicating the need for further coaching.

These quantitative results confirm the diversity of teachers' needs and reinforce the need for a differentiated approach in supervision.

### Contribution of Supervision to Strengthening Quality Culture

Supervision has a positive impact on strengthening quality culture in schools, including:

1. Compliance with Merdeka Curriculum

Before the supervision program was implemented consistently, only 45% of teachers used the appropriate teaching modules. After one semester, this figure increased to 87%, supported by feedback from the principal who suggested using the Merdeka Teaching Platform.

2. Teacher Reflective Practice

As many as 80% of teachers regularly write reflection journals after learning. This has become a habit that is practiced in the KKG forum, which is active twice a month.

3. Collaboration and Peer Observation

Teachers began to observe each other and conduct peer coaching. This practice is mainly implemented by teachers with high supervision scores as models and mentors.

4. Data-Driven Assessment

Teachers integrate diagnostic assessment results into lesson plans. All teachers in the Very Good and Good categories have routinely analyzed students' formative data and brought it to the KKG forum.

5. Teachers' Role in School Vision

Teachers are starting to be involved in developing the school vision and strategy. Teachers with high supervision scores were appointed as coordinators of the annual program development.

The effectiveness of this supervision is reflected in an increase in the average score of students' learning outcomes by 6-8 points and a student satisfaction rate of 80%, especially in Indonesian and social studies subjects.

**Supporting and Inhibiting Factors**

1. Supporting Factors

a. Participatory leadership

Participatory leadership is a leadership approach that emphasizes the importance of involving all school members in the decision-making process, especially teachers. In this context, the principal acts as a facilitator who provides the widest possible space for teachers to express their opinions, ideas, and considerations in formulating school policies. This approach creates a democratic working atmosphere where every voice is considered important and worthy of consideration. Teachers feel more valued and have a sense of ownership of the policies agreed upon. As a result, they tend to be more enthusiastic in carrying out their duties and responsibilities. Principals who implement participatory leadership usually build open communication and healthy professional relationships with teachers. The process of discussion, deliberation, and joint reflection becomes part of the school culture. By actively involving teachers, decisions are more targeted and easier to implement. In addition, participatory leadership also contributes to improving the overall quality of school management because it is based on collaboration and togetherness in achieving educational goals.

b. Reflective habits

Reflective habits are an important part of a teacher's professionalism in improving the quality of learning. Teachers who have reflective habits regularly

evaluate their teaching experiences to find strengths and weaknesses in the learning process. This activity is not only done individually, but also often shared and discussed with colleagues. Whether through formal forums such as teacher meetings, workshops or casual chats in the teachers' room, this reflection becomes a means of sharing experiences and learning from each other. Through these discussions, teachers can give each other feedback, exchange strategies, and formulate solutions to challenges faced in the classroom. This habit fosters a collaborative culture and strengthens the learning community in the school environment. Reflection also helps teachers realize the importance of changing teaching approaches according to student needs. Reflective teachers tend to be more open to criticism and have a strong desire to keep improving. Reflective practice is thus an important foundation in efforts to improve the quality of education. This habit not only enriches pedagogical insights but also strengthens professional relationships between teachers as learning partners.

c. Technology utilization

The use of technology in the school environment has become an integral part of teachers' professional practice. One concrete form of this utilization is the use of the Merdeka Mengajar (PMM) platform and WhatsApp groups as a means of sharing good practices between educators. Through PMM, teachers can access various references, teaching modules, learning videos, and participate in online training that supports competency development. On the other hand, WhatsApp group is a fast and flexible communication medium that allows teachers to exchange information, experiences, and creative ideas in teaching. This collaboration creates an active, dynamic, and mutually supportive learning community. Technology also bridges teachers in different locations to stay connected and inspire each other. Regular sharing of good practices encourages a reflective and collaborative culture in improving the quality of learning. In addition, the use of technology also facilitates documentation and the wider dissemination of learning innovations. Teachers become more open to updates and the use of digitalization to support the teaching and learning process. Thus, the use of technology not only improves communication efficiency but also strengthens the role of teachers as lifelong learners.

d. Consistency in coaching

Consistency in coaching is a key factor in supporting improvements in the quality of teacher performance. Repeated and continuous supervision creates space for teachers to continue developing through constructive feedback. Principals or education supervisors regularly observe the learning process in the classroom and provide constructive feedback. This process is not a one-off, but is done in regular cycles so that the expected changes can be monitored in real time. Consistent coaching helps teachers improve weaknesses, maintain good practices and try new strategies in learning. In addition, continuity of supervision creates positive professional relationships between teachers and supervisors, based on trust and shared goals. Regular supervision also encourages teachers to be more reflective and open to

suggestions for improvement. When coaching is systematic, the quality of learning tends to improve sustainably. With a consistent approach, schools can build a culture of quality that is oriented towards continuous improvement. Continuous supervision is not just an evaluation, but a mentoring process that strengthens teachers' competence and professionalism.

## 2. Inhibiting Factors

### a. Principal's administrative burden

The high administrative burden is a real challenge in implementing the principal's managerial role. Responsibilities that include financial reports, infrastructure management, and personnel administration often take up the principal's time and energy. As a result, learning supervision activities that should be a priority can be delayed. Delayed supervision causes a loss of momentum in providing timely feedback to teachers. Consistent supervision is very important to support the improvement of the quality of the teaching and learning process. The irregularity of supervision also has an impact on teachers' professional development. Teachers also feel that they are not monitored or do not get enough direction regarding learning improvement. Principals need to balance their administrative duties and academic coaching functions. Delegating tasks to the school management team can be a solution to reduce the burden. If supervision is carried out in a scheduled and systematic manner, despite the high administrative burden, quality coaching can still run optimally.

### b. Teacher readiness varies

Teacher readiness to receive coaching often varies depending on their experience, character and mindset. Senior teachers, although experienced, sometimes show a defensive attitude when receiving open feedback. This could be due to old habits, high self-confidence or discomfort with change. In the context of supervision, this is a challenge for principals and supervisors. Feedback intended for improvement may be met with resistance or self-defense. Therefore, a humanistic, dialogic, and respect-based approach is essential in coaching senior teachers. Warm and empathetic communication can open up space for better acceptance of feedback. Modeling good practices or peer coaching can also be an effective alternative to inspire without judgment. A variety of approaches to supervision is key in managing differences in teacher readiness. When teachers feel valued, they are more likely to be open to constructive change.

### c. Limited infrastructure, unstable internet in some classrooms

Limited infrastructure is a significant obstacle in implementing technology-based learning. One of the main obstacles is the unstable internet in some classrooms. This condition makes it difficult for teachers to access digital materials, use online learning platforms, or optimally utilize educational applications. When the network is not supportive, the learning process can be disrupted or even delayed. This also affects the enthusiasm of teachers and students in utilizing technology as part of the learning process. Amid digital transformation efforts in education, inadequate infrastructure is a major challenge. Schools need to take strategic steps such as procuring signal boosters, setting up alternative devices, or developing offline teaching materials as an

alternative. Principals and school committees can also propose budget support from the government or partners. Strong infrastructure is an important foundation for realizing 21st-century learning. Without adequate technical support, innovation in learning will be difficult to develop evenly.

### **Follow-up and Sustainability Strategies**

To ensure the sustainability of supervision practices and the culture of quality, principals implement the following strategies:

1. Strengthening KKG: This forum is the main space for reflection. Teachers are asked to compile reflection reports and follow-up learning.
2. Lesson Study and Microteaching: Teachers conduct teaching simulations, which are documented and evaluated every two months.
3. Digital Monitoring: Teacher supervision and reflection are integrated into the Merdeka Mengajar Platform to facilitate documentation.
4. Committee and Parent Engagement: Programs such as Parent Day strengthen public trust in learning practices.
5. Integration with School Vision: All school programs are designed based on the principles of quality culture and strengthening teacher professionalism.

The principal said:

"Supervision does not stop after observation, but continues in the teachers' room, KKG, and even to parents."

### **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

This study concludes that academic supervision conducted by principals at SD Negeri 021 Sungai Kunjang runs in a planned, collaborative and sustainable manner. The principal does not only act as a supervisor, but also as a coach and partner of teachers in improving the quality of learning. Supervision is conducted through classroom visits, observation, reflection and feedback that encourages teachers to continue to develop. These supervision activities have encouraged teachers to understand and implement Merdeka Curriculum better.

The impact of this supervision can be seen from the increased use of teaching modules according to the curriculum, the growth of teachers' reflective habits, and the stronger collaboration between teachers through the KKG forum. Teachers also began to routinely write reflection journals, discuss in groups, and observe each other through peer teaching. In addition, teachers were involved in designing the school's vision and programs, indicating their increased role in decision-making. All these processes show that academic supervision directly contributes to building a culture of quality in schools.

The successful implementation of supervision is inseparable from several supporting factors. The participatory leadership of the principal creates an open and trusting working atmosphere. Reflective habits and the use of technology, such as the Merdeka Mengajar Platform and WhatsApp groups, accelerate the communication and learning process between teachers. In addition, the consistent implementation of supervision strengthens teachers' commitment to continuous self-development.

However, there are still challenges that need to be overcome. The heavy administrative burden of principals often delays supervision. In addition, the different readiness of teachers, especially senior teachers who are less open to feedback, is an obstacle. Uneven infrastructure, such as unstable internet in some classrooms, is also a barrier to the implementation of learning technology.

To ensure that supervision continues to have an impact, the school has implemented various follow-up strategies. These include strengthening the KKG forum, implementing lesson study, digital monitoring through PMM, involving parents through Parent Day, and aligning all school programs with the vision of quality culture.

Overall, academic supervision at SD Negeri 021 Sungai Kunjang has proven effective in improving teacher professionalism and strengthening the school's quality culture. Supervision that is conducted consistently, openly and according to teachers' needs has made the school an adaptive, collaborative and learning-oriented place. The principal plays an important role as a learning leader who is able to facilitate gradual positive change.

#### **FURTHER STUDY**

This research still has limitations, so further research on this topic is still needed.

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