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Instructional Leadership, Pedagogical Competence, and School Culture: Determinants of Learning Quality in Public Junior High Schools in Rembang District

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A B S T R A C T

Improving learning quality in secondary education requires the integration of multiple factors, including school leadership, teacher competence, and organizational culture. In non-urban areas such as Rembang District, public junior high schools often face challenges in maximizing these aspects to achieve effective teaching and learning outcomes. This study aims to analyze the influence of principal instructional leadership, teachers' pedagogical competence, and school quality culture on learning quality in public junior high schools in Rembang District. Using a quantitative survey approach, data were collected from 145 teachers through a validated and reliable Likert-scale questionnaire, and analyzed using simple and multiple linear regression techniques. The results indicate that all three variables have a positive and significant effect on learning quality, both individually and collectively, with school quality culture being the most dominant factor. Together, the variables explain 94.4% of the variance in learning quality. These findings underscore the importance of synergy among leadership, competence, and culture in improving learning outcomes and provide strategic insights for school-based policy development.

1. Introduction

The quality of learning is a key indicator in achieving educational goals at the school level. Quality learning reflects the integration of classroom management, psychological support, and the application of teaching methods that are aligned with both the characteristics of students and the prevailing curriculum. According to Ministry of Education and Culture Regulation (Permendikbud) No. 9 of 2022, learning quality is classified into three main dimensions: (1) Classroom management, which includes a well-ordered learning environment and positive discipline; (2) Psychological support, which encompasses affective support, teacher attentiveness, and constructive feedback; and (3) Teaching methods, including

adaptive instruction, teacher guidance, literacy and numeracy learning, and interactive activities.

However, the 2024 Education Report Card shows that the average learning quality score in public junior high schools (SMP Negeri) in Rembang District is 68.14, below the minimum "medium proficiency" threshold of 80.42. Among the three dimensions, classroom management and psychological support average around 69, while teaching methods is the lowest at approximately 64. These figures indicate the need for targeted interventions to improve teacher–student interactions, teaching strategies, and classroom environments. Three key factors are suspected to significantly influence these outcomes: the principal's instructional leadership, teachers' pedagogical competence, and the school's quality culture.

Instructional leadership focuses on improving the teaching and learning process, curriculum management, and teacher professional development (Ramadhan & Suparman, 2022). Permendikbud No. 6 of 2018 emphasizes that principals must play a strategic role in developing education quality. The latest education report shows that the average instructional leadership score across public junior high schools in Rembang District is only 60.54, far below the ideal target of 80.42. The lowest performance is found in the dimension of formulating and implementing the school's vision and mission (around 52.7), followed by curriculum management (65.2) and support for teacher reflection (66.7). These results point to weaknesses in strategic direction, curriculum coherence, and reflective teaching practices (Ramadhan & Suparman, 2022; Permendikbud, 2022).

Teachers' pedagogical competence plays a pivotal role in ensuring the effectiveness of the teaching and learning process. This competence encompasses the ability to manage classrooms effectively, select appropriate instructional strategies, and conduct assessments that align with students' learning needs (Werdiningsih et al., 2023). Hafitriani (2021) emphasizes that continuous pedagogical training has a significant positive impact on student learning outcomes. However, supervision reports from school principals in Rembang District indicate that several pedagogical indicators remain below the expected standards, with scores of 65% for learning environment management, 70% for the use of instructional media, and 60% for the provision of feedback**.**

School quality culture is another essential determinant of a positive and productive learning environment (Abzul et al., 2022; Marjoko et al., 2017). It reflects a shared vision, work ethic, collective commitment, and continuous evaluation. In Rembang District, quality culture indicators also fall short of expectations. Vision communication averages around 70%, teacher involvement 75%, and sustainable evaluation systems 65%, all below the target standard of 80%. Given these findings and conditions, this study aims to empirically examine the influence of instructional leadership, teachers' pedagogical competence, and school quality culture on learning quality in public junior high schools in Rembang District. The findings are expected to provide data-based strategic recommendations for improving educational policies and practices at the school level.

Learning quality reflects the success of the educational process in achieving students' academic and non-academic goals. Daryanto (2023) states that quality learning is characterized by positive teacher student interactions, appropriate instructional strategies, and a supportive learning environment. Sanjaya (2022) adds that learning quality can be measured by active student engagement and achievement of learning outcomes aligned with curriculum standards. Haryati (2019) emphasizes the importance of synergy among teachers, students, media, and the learning environment as key components of optimal learning quality. According to Permendikbud No. 16 of 2022 and No. 9 of 2022, learning quality is influenced by three key dimensions: classroom management, psychological support, and teaching methods. These dimensions underpin effective, student-centered teacher–student interactions that target cognitive, affective, and psychomotor competencies.

Learning quality is not determined solely by in class strategies, but also by factors such as school leadership, teachers' pedagogical competence, school quality culture, and the physical and emotional learning environment. Arneti et al. (2024) highlight that school principals with a clear vision can create ecosystems that support teachers' professional development. Daryanto (2023) asserts that pedagogically competent teachers are better able to apply strategies that meet students' needs. A positive quality culture, according to Dwiyono et al. (2022), fosters an innovative climate that encourages participation of all school members in improving learning quality. Harlita and Ramadan (2023) stress the importance of developing students' socio-emotional competencies to build productive and harmonious classrooms. Kundiastuti et al. (2024) and Nurhayati & Rahmadani (2023) show that the use of educational technology and a conducive learning environment enhances student engagement and learning effectiveness. In the view of Kejarpena (2023) and Hattie (2020), learning quality results from the systemic and integrated combination of teacher, student, instructional, and organizational factors.

Instructional leadership refers to the principal's role in focusing on improving learning processes. Mulyasa (2023) defines instructional leadership as involving curriculum development, academic supervision, and the creation of a supportive learning climate. Sanjaya (2023) and Hermawan (2023) emphasize the importance of principals guiding teachers, facilitating reflection, and fostering results-based learning. Wibowo (2022) adds that effective leadership integrates human resource development, organizational culture, and instructional management. According to Permendikbud No. 9 of 2022, instructional leadership consists of: (1) establishing a vision and mission for learning, (2) managing the curriculum, and (3) supporting teacher reflection. Studies by Hallinger (2019), Murphy (2020), and Robinson et al. (2019) emphasize that instructional leadership can positively impact student outcomes when principals foster collaborative climates and data-driven decision-making.

Pedagogical competence is a fundamental requirement for teachers to conduct effective instruction. Werdiningsih et al. (2022) state that pedagogical competence involves not only understanding learning theories but also designing lesson plans, using instructional media, and conducting objective assessments. Wahardi et al.

(2016) add that it includes reflective dimensions, technology integration, and understanding student characteristics. Romlah et al. (2019) assert that pedagogical competence is influenced by school leadership, teacher professionalism, instructional innovation, and accountability. Studies by Firdaus et al. (2022) and Shunhaji & Zulaihah (2022) demonstrate that principal support through academic supervision significantly enhances teachers' pedagogical competence.

School quality culture refers to the shared values, beliefs, and practices aimed at achieving sustainable education quality (Widodo, 2018). Said (2018) and Hidayat et al. (2018) stress that quality culture is reflected in strong leadership, collective commitment, and ongoing evaluation and reflection. Ahadiyah (2020) highlights the application of Total Quality Management (TQM) in fostering a collaborative school culture. Permendikbud No. 28 of 2016 and No. 63 of 2009 stipulate that developing quality culture involves planning, implementing, evaluating, controlling, and improving quality. Falah (2023) and Umam et al. (2017) reinforce that quality culture is not merely about formal structures, but also about teachers' and students' self-efficacy, commitment to innovation, and stakeholder engagement.

Instructional leadership, pedagogical competence, and school quality culture are directly related to learning quality. Leithwood (2022), Robinson (2019), and Marzano (2023) stress that collaboration between principals, teachers, and the school community is essential to improving educational quality. Raihani (2020) and Wahyudi (2022) also highlight the importance of infrastructure, student engagement, and managerial support in fostering meaningful learning. Overall, the literature shows that strong instructional leadership, high pedagogical competence, and an embedded quality culture are foundational to achieving quality learning at the school level.

2. Methodology

This study employed a quantitative approach with an explanatory design to examine the influence of school principals' instructional leadership, teachers' pedagogical competence, and school quality culture on learning quality. This approach enables the objective collection of numerical data through surveys (Ghozali, 2018). The instrument used was a five-point Likert-scale questionnaire developed based on theoretical indicators for each variable. The population consisted of all public junior high school teachers in Rembang District, totaling 228 individuals. A sample of 145 teachers was selected using proportional random sampling, based on the Slovin formula with a 5% margin of error. The sample was proportionally distributed across the six schools included in the study.

Data collection was carried out by distributing printed questionnaires directly to respondents at each school, with prior permission from the principals. Respondents were given clear instructions on how to fill out the questionnaire, and the researcher was present to provide clarification when needed. All completed questionnaires were collected on the same day to ensure a high response rate and minimize missing

data. Instrument validity was tested using the Pearson Product Moment correlation, with significance criteria of $p < 0.05$ and r calculated > r table (Ghozali, 2018). Reliability was tested using Cronbach's Alpha, with alpha values greater than 0.60 considered reliable (Sugiyono, 2014). The results showed that all questionnaire items were valid and highly reliable (alpha > 0.90).

Data processing began with coding each respondent's answers into numeric values, followed by tabulation in Microsoft Excel. The coded data were then imported into SPSS version 25 for statistical analysis. The analysis stages included descriptive statistics to describe each variable, classical assumption tests (normality, linearity, multicollinearity) to ensure model feasibility, and multiple linear regression to assess both partial and simultaneous effects among variables. The regression model used was: $Y = a + b_1X_1 + b_2X_2 + b_3X_3$, where Y represents learning quality, and X_1, X_2, and X_3 respectively refer to instructional leadership, pedagogical competence, and school quality culture. The interpretation of results was aligned with relevant theories and previous findings (Arifin, 2017; Sugiyono, 2014).

3. Results and Discussion

Public junior high schools in Rembang District operate in diverse contexts, ranging from schools located in urban centers with better access to educational resources, to those in rural areas with limited infrastructure. Some schools face challenges such as insufficient teaching facilities, lack of ICT integration, and limited professional development opportunities for teachers. In addition, the socio-economic background of students varies considerably, influencing learning engagement and outcomes. While certain schools demonstrate strong leadership and collaborative teacher communities, others still struggle to establish a shared vision and consistent instructional practices. This diversity in school conditions underlines the importance of examining the factors that contribute to learning quality, including principals' instructional leadership, teachers' pedagogical competence, and the strength of school quality culture. To measure these variables in a quantitative manner, a structured questionnaire using a five-point Likert scale was developed based on relevant theoretical frameworks and prior research instruments. Table 1 presents examples of questionnaire items representing each variable, designed to capture teachers' perceptions regarding instructional leadership, pedagogical competence, school quality culture, and learning quality.

Table 1. Sample Questionnaire Items for Each Research Variable

Variabele	Sample Questionnaire Items (5-Point Likert Scale)
Instructional Leadership (X_1)	1. The principal clearly communicates the school's vision and mission to teachers. 2. The principal ensures that the curriculum is implemented according to established standards. 3. The principal facilitates teachers' reflective activities to improve instructional practices.
Pedagogical Competence (X_2)	1. I choose teaching methods that match students' learning needs.

	2. I manage the classroom to ensure active participation from all students. 3. assess learning outcomes objectively and provide constructive feedback.
Pedagogical Competence (X_2)	1. The school fosters effective collaboration between teachers, students, and parents. 2. The school implements quality assurance practices regularly. 3. The school uses evaluation results to improve teaching and learning programs.
Learning Quality (Y)	1. Teaching and learning activities in my school run effectively and efficiently.. 2. Learning objectives are consistently achieved according to the curriculum. 3. Students are actively engaged during the learning process.

Descriptive statistics were employed to describe the respondents' tendencies regarding the four main variables in this study: School Principals' Instructional Leadership (X_1), Teachers' Pedagogical Competence (X_2), School Quality Culture (X_3), and Learning Quality (Y). Data were collected from 145 teachers at public junior high schools in Rembang District and analyzed using SPSS. Based on the analysis results, all variables showed positive average scores, with the dominant category being "fairly high." For learning quality, the average score was 85.36 (on a possible maximum of 140), with a wide range between the lowest and highest scores, indicating both high and low perceptions among teachers. Instructional leadership scored an average of 124.03, with relatively consistent perceptions across respondents, although 26.5% still rated their principal's leadership as low. Pedagogical competence averaged 120.38, yet 31.6% of teachers rated their competence low, especially in assessment and differentiated instruction. School quality culture had the highest mean score of 132.63, but 28.2% of respondents rated it low, suggesting uneven implementation of quality culture practices across schools. To provide a clearer overview of these statistical tendencies, the descriptive results for each variable are summarized in the following table 2, which presents the mean scores, score ranges, standard deviations, and dominant categories identified in the data.

Table 2. Summary of Descriptive Statistical Results

Variable	Mean	Score Range	Standard Deviation	Dominant Category	Score Interval (Dominant)	Percentage (%)
Learning Quality (Y)	85.36	29–139	21.678	Fairly High	73–94	38.50
Instructional Leadership (X_1)	124.03	115–133	3.284	Fairly High	123–126	46.20
Pedagogical Competence (X_2)	120.38	112–128	3.269	Fairly High	120–123	44.40
School Quality Culture (X_3)	132.63	120–144	5.184	Fairly High	130–134	36.80

The data in table 2 indicate that all variables were perceived positively, with the dominant category being "fairly high." For the learning quality variable, the highest score reached 139 out of a possible 140, while the lowest was 29, representing a wide range (110 points). This indicates the presence of teachers with both very high and very low perceptions of learning quality, suggesting the need for differentiated interventions to improve instructional quality. The instructional leadership variable showed a narrower score distribution, ranging from 115 to 133, with a standard deviation of 3.284, indicating relatively consistent teacher perceptions of principals' leadership styles. Although the average falls within the "fairly high" category, 26.5% of respondents rated their principal's leadership as "low," highlighting the need for improvement in certain schools.

For pedagogical competence, the data distribution showed that most teachers perceived their competence as "fairly high." However, 31.6% of respondents fell into the "low" category, particularly in aspects related to assessment and differentiated instruction. This underscores the importance of enhancing teacher professionalism through continuous training (Glickman et al., 2017). Lastly, school quality culture had the highest average score among all variables, at 132.63 out of a maximum score of 170. Although the majority of respondents (36.8%) were in the "fairly high" category, 28.2% were in the "low" category, indicating that the implementation of a quality culture has not been evenly distributed across schools. This points to the need to strengthen continuous evaluation practices and stakeholder collaboration (Sallis, 2015). Overall, the descriptive statistics show that the four variables under study are generally in a favorable condition in public junior high schools in Rembang District. However, there remains room for improvement, particularly in the areas of pedagogical competence and the consistency of quality culture practices in schools.

Before conducting linear regression analysis, the basic assumptions of regression were tested, including normality, linearity, multicollinearity, and heteroscedasticity. These four assumptions are essential to ensure the model's validity and accuracy (Hair et al., 2019). The normality test using the Kolmogorov Smirnov test yielded a significance value of 0.200 (> 0.05), indicating that the residuals are normally distributed. This means that the deviations between predicted and actual values are random, satisfying the assumptions of parametric regression. Linearity was tested using the ANOVA Test for Linearity, where the significance values for all variable pairs were greater than 0.05, indicating a linear relationship between the independent and dependent variables (Ghozali, 2016). Multicollinearity was examined using Tolerance values (> 0.1) and Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values (< 10). The results showed no symptoms of multicollinearity, meaning each independent variable contributes uniquely to the model. The heteroscedasticity test, using the Glejser method, yielded significance values > 0.05 for all variables, indicating no heteroscedasticity. In other words, the residual variance is constant (homoscedastic). As all assumption tests were met, the regression model in this study was deemed suitable for further analysis and supports the validity of hypothesis testing.

Hypothesis testing was conducted to determine the influence of each independent variable, both partially and simultaneously, on learning quality. The analysis utilized simple and multiple linear regression. The simple regression results showed that school principals' instructional leadership (X_1) had a positive and significant effect on learning quality (Y), with a regression coefficient of 3.098 and a significance level of 0.000 ($p < 0.05$). The R^2 value of 0.602 indicates that 60.2% of the variation in learning quality is explained by instructional leadership. Teachers' pedagogical competence (X_2) also had a positive and significant effect on learning quality, with a regression coefficient of 1.520 and significance of 0.013.

The R^2 value of 0.420 means that 42.0% of the variation in learning quality is influenced by teachers' pedagogical competence. School quality culture (X_3) showed the strongest influence, with a regression coefficient of 3.141 and a significance value of 0.000. The R^2 value of 0.650 indicates that 65.0% of the variation in learning quality is explained by the school's quality culture. Simultaneously, all three independent variables had a significant influence on learning quality, with a significance value of 0.000 and an *F* value of 638.327. The coefficient of determination (R^2) was 0.944, meaning that 94.4% of the variation in learning quality can be explained collectively by the three independent variables. The resulting multiple linear regression equation is: $Y = 18.223 + 6.099X_1 + 6.718X_2 + 6.511X_3$.

School principals' instructional leadership was proven to significantly enhance learning quality. Principals who are able to articulate an academic vision, manage the curriculum, and support teachers through reflective supervision have a positive impact on the learning process (Mulyasa, 2023). This result is consistent with findings by Hallinger (2019), Robinson (2019), and Hermawan (2023), who emphasize the critical role of instructional leadership in improving teacher effectiveness and student achievement. Teachers' pedagogical competence also positively influences learning quality. Teachers who are skilled in designing, implementing, and evaluating instruction can create a student-centered and conducive classroom environment (Werdiningsih et al., 2022; Romlah et al., 2019). In practice, teachers who actively engage in professional development and reflective activities demonstrate improved instructional practices and student outcomes.

School quality culture contributes significantly to learning quality. Schools with a strong quality culture exhibit high standards, ongoing evaluation, and solid collaboration (Dwiyono et al., 2022). Ahadiyah (2020) affirms that quality culture, grounded in internal quality assurance systems and collective values such as commitment and accountability, supports successful learning outcomes. Collectively, the three variables have a significant simultaneous effect on learning quality. These findings support the views of Leithwood (2022) and Marzano (2023), who argue that improving educational quality requires synergy among effective leadership, competent teachers, and a supportive school environment. Together, these components form the foundation of a high-quality and sustainable learning system.

4. Conclusion

Based on data from 145 public junior high school teachers in Rembang District, this study concludes that learning quality is significantly influenced by three main factors: school principals' instructional leadership, teachers' pedagogical competence, and school quality culture. Each of these variables has a positive and significant effect both individually and collectively, explaining 94.4% of the variance in learning quality. Instructional leadership enhances learning quality through supervision, curriculum monitoring, and support for teacher development, creating a productive learning environment. Pedagogical competence ensures that instruction is well-designed, aligned with student characteristics, and supported by appropriate assessment, leading to meaningful learning experiences. School quality culture emerges as the most dominant factor, where collaboration, shared commitment, and continuous evaluation foster a conducive atmosphere for effective and comprehensive learning. These findings highlight the importance of a systemic and integrated approach that combines leadership, teacher competence, and organizational culture to improve learning outcomes.

The novelty of this research lies in integrating instructional leadership, pedagogical competence, and quality culture into one analytical model, with a particular focus on junior secondary schools in non-urban contexts such as Rembang District. It reinforces the critical role of school quality culture, a variable rarely examined alongside leadership and teacher competence. However, the study's scope was limited to public junior high schools within one district, restricting generalization to private schools or other education levels. Furthermore, the quantitative approach did not capture the subjective perspectives of principals or teachers. Future studies employing qualitative or mixed-method designs are recommended to explore deeper contextual insights and enrich understanding of the dynamics influencing learning quality.

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