



# Journal of Educational Sciences

Journal homepage: <https://jes.ejournal.unri.ac.id/index.php/JES>



P-ISSN  
2581-1657

E-ISSN  
2581-2203

## The Role of the School Principal as a Manager in Improving the Quality of Learning Through Learning Communities at SD Negeri 1 Kalipang, Rembang Regency

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### ARTICLE INFO

#### Article history:

Received: 22 Nov 2025

Revised: 19 Des 2025

Accepted: 24 Des 2025

Published online: 05 Jan 2026

#### Keywords:

Principal Leadership,  
Learning Communities,  
Teaching Quality,  
Teacher Collaboration,  
Educational Management

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#### Article Doi:

<https://doi.org/10.31258/jes.10.1.p.970-982>

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### ABSTRACT

This study examines the role of the principal as a manager in improving the quality of learning through learning communities at SD Negeri 1 Kalipang. The research aims to understand how effective school leadership can enhance teaching quality by organizing collaborative learning environments for teachers. The findings suggest that the principal's involvement in planning, organizing resources, and motivating teachers has significantly contributed to the success of the learning community program. By engaging teachers in collaborative activities and fostering a culture of continuous professional development, the school has enhanced both teaching competencies and student engagement. Despite challenges such as a limited number of certified teachers in certain subjects, the school has been successful in overcoming these obstacles through training and resource optimization. This study highlights the importance of a principal's leadership in fostering a supportive learning community, which ultimately improves educational outcomes. The results provide valuable insights for other schools aiming to implement similar programs to enhance learning quality and teacher development.

## 1. Introduction

Primary education holds a strategic role in shaping the quality of human resources by strengthening knowledge, skills, and character competencies from the early stages of schooling. The success of educational institutions in delivering high-quality learning is not only influenced by curriculum and facilities, but is also strongly determined by the quality of the school principal's leadership as an educational manager who systematically carries out planning, organizing,

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implementing, supervising, and evaluating (Mahzum et al., 2022). Within the national policy framework, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology Regulation (Permendikbudristek) No. 40 of 2021 affirms that the school principal is a learning leader responsible for activating learning communities, creating a safe learning environment, and facilitating teachers' professional development.

Learning quality in primary schools is also influenced by collaborative culture and continuous reflective practice among teachers. Permendikbudristek No. 9 of 2022 on the Standards for Primary and Secondary Education emphasizes the importance of learning communities as a platform for sharing best practices, strengthening teacher capacity, and ensuring student-centered learning. Consistent with this view, 21st-century educational leadership demands principals who can direct, motivate, and guide teachers to be more adaptive to change and instructional innovation (Sahirah et al., 2024). Prior studies indicate that learning communities significantly improve teacher competence and learning quality when principals effectively manage structures, roles, and collaboration dynamics (Siahaan et al., 2022; Nugroho, 2022; Suryana, 2022; Hidayati, 2023).

As a developing primary education institution, SD Negeri 1 Kalipang demonstrates a strong commitment to implementing learning community practices to improve learning quality. Data from the Education Report (Rapor Pendidikan) for 2022–2024 indicate improvements in literacy and numeracy competencies, supported by achievements in academic and non-academic competitions at the district level. The school's efforts to provide a digital library and integrate technology into learning also align with current demands for digital transformation in school management (Putri & Saputra, 2024; Haq & Haq, 2023). Nevertheless, several challenges persist, such as suboptimal parental involvement and unequal learning quality across classrooms.

The role of the principal as a manager becomes central in optimizing learning communities within the school. Principals must be able to formulate strategic planning, organize resources effectively, provide direction and motivation to teachers, and conduct ongoing supervision and evaluation of learning community performance (Ramdhani, 2021; Wiranti et al., 2024). Recent studies show that the effectiveness of learning communities is strongly shaped by the principal's collaborative leadership in creating an environment that supports innovation and teacher participation (Prastowo & Hidayah, 2022; Kamaludin, 2023). Moreover, adaptive leadership strengthens teachers' reflective culture and enhances classroom instructional practices (Fitriyani, 2023; Nurhidayah, 2024).

Despite the positive progress achieved by SD Negeri 1 Kalipang, existing learning community practices are not yet fully optimized. Preliminary findings indicate that many activities still focus on administrative agendas rather than reflection, coaching, and sharing of best practices, which are the essential characteristics of professional learning communities. In addition, documentation of the principal's

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leadership practices in managing learning communities remains limited, making it difficult to replicate or further develop evidence-based leadership models.

Learning quality itself is a fundamental indicator of educational success, reflecting the effectiveness of teacher–student interaction, instructional strategies, and holistic competency development. Permendikbudristek No. 16 of 2022 states that high-quality learning must be interactive, enjoyable, challenging, and motivating, while Permendikbudristek No. 9 of 2022 highlights the importance of strengthening literacy, numeracy, and socio-emotional competencies. From a theoretical perspective, Mulyasa (2021) asserts that learning quality results from effective and innovative educational management, whereas Sanjaya (2022) emphasizes the significance of harmonious interaction between teachers, students, learning materials, and the learning environment. Learning quality is influenced by teacher competence, learner characteristics, facilities, and the learning environment (Kejarpena, 2023). Hattie (2020) further explains that learning quality is shaped by four major factors: teachers, students, instructional strategies, and school management.

Within the school management context, principals serve a crucial managerial function. Permendikbud No. 6 of 2018 and Permendikbudristek No. 40 of 2021 affirm that school principals are responsible for managerial duties, supervision, and resource development to improve school quality. Kamaludin (2023) highlights the need for principals to be adaptive to educational changes, while Wiranti, Maesaroh, and Arifin (2024) stress the importance of optimizing resources and supporting teacher professionalism. Effective planning requires principals to design vision-driven strategies (Suharsaputra, 2020), including systematic learning community programs (Prastowo & Hidayah, 2022). Communication also plays a vital role in leadership; Hidayati (2023) and Fitriyani (2023) demonstrate that open and empathetic communication strengthens teacher participation and collaborative culture. Moreover, the ability to organize resources is essential to school program success (Suharsaputra, 2020), and principals must act as agents of change to promote instructional innovation (Fullan, 2020).

Learning communities, as professional collaboration forums, enable teachers to reflect on instructional practices, share experiences, and develop competencies continuously. Nurhidayah (2024) defines learning communities as spaces for teacher reflection and collaboration, while Sekar (2020) and Cadisa (2022) highlight their role in enhancing confidence and professional competence. Research confirms that well-managed learning communities positively impact learning quality and student outcomes (DuFour & Eaker, 2018; Vescio et al., 2018; Lomos et al., 2017). Wells & Feun (2013) and Owen (2016) emphasize that effective learning communities focus on improving student outcomes, professional collaboration, and continuous reflection. Principals play a decisive role in ensuring the effectiveness of learning communities by providing adequate time, space, motivation, and resources. Prastowo & Hidayah (2022) assert that principal leadership strongly influences learning community success, while Ramdhani (2021) underscores the importance of optimizing school resources. Furthermore,

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principals must foster a culture of collaboration and encourage the sharing of best practices among teachers (Suryana, 2022).

Given these conditions, this research is highly relevant to provide a comprehensive understanding of how the school principal carries out managerial functions to improve learning quality through learning communities. The study is expected to contribute to the field of educational leadership, particularly in the implementation of learning communities as a strategy for improving instructional quality in primary schools. The purpose of this study is to analyze the role of the school principal as a manager in improving the quality of learning through learning communities at SD Negeri 1 Kalipang, Rembang Regency.

## **2. Methodology**

This study employed a qualitative approach with a case study design aimed at providing an in-depth description of the principal's managerial role in improving learning quality through learning communities at SD Negeri 1 Kalipang, Rembang Regency. A qualitative approach was selected because it enables the exploration of phenomena in a natural, contextual, and holistic manner, allowing the researcher to understand the principal's managerial practices deeply through direct interaction with research subjects (Sugiyono, 2020). The case study design was used to examine in detail the activities, processes, and leadership dynamics of the school principal within a specific educational setting, thereby producing comprehensive insights into how the principal manages the learning community. This research was conducted at SD Negeri 1 Kalipang, Rembang Regency, which was purposefully selected because the school has an active learning community that supports efforts to improve learning quality. The study focused on four managerial aspects of the principal planning, organizing, implementing, and evaluating learning community programs. The selection of these focal areas aligns with recent findings emphasizing that the effectiveness of learning communities largely depends on the principal's ability to manage resources, foster a collaborative culture, and ensure the continuity of teachers' reflective practices (Nurhidayah, 2024).

Research informants were determined using purposive sampling based on the relevance of their roles and the depth of information needed. Informants included the school principal, core members of the learning community, and several teachers who actively participated in collaborative activities related to the program implementation. This technique was chosen to obtain rich, focused, and meaningful data aligned with the research objectives (Rahmawati, 2022). Furthermore, gathering data from multiple informants enabled perspective triangulation, allowing the researcher to compare viewpoints, verify consistency, and strengthen the credibility and trustworthiness of the research findings.

Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and document analysis, which are the primary techniques in qualitative research. Interviews were conducted to explore the perceptions, experiences, and practices of

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the school principal and teachers in managing the learning community. Observation was used to obtain direct insights into the implementation of learning community activities, teacher interaction patterns, and the principal's managerial practices in facilitating these activities. Document analysis was performed on school plans (RKS), annual programs (RKT), meeting minutes, and instruments used in learning community activities as supporting data sources. Technique triangulation was employed to ensure data trustworthiness and minimize research bias (Nugroho, 2023).

Data analysis was carried out in stages through data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. This process took place continuously from initial data collection through final interpretation, enabling the researcher to identify patterns, relationships, and underlying meanings within the principal's managerial activities in the context of the learning community. This analytical approach allowed the researcher to organize complex qualitative data systematically and interpret it accurately. It is consistent with contemporary qualitative analysis, which emphasizes in-depth interpretation, iterative analysis, and ongoing reflective processes in understanding field data and generating meaningful research conclusions (Lestari, 2024).

Data validity was strengthened through source and technique triangulation, member checking, and peer debriefing. Research validity was also supported by documentation of learning community activities, program implementation reports, and other relevant physical evidence. To improve reliability, the researcher used structured interview guidelines and systematically documented the research process. This model of data quality assurance aligns with current qualitative research principles that emphasize credibility, transferability, and dependability (Wibowo et al., 2025). Through this research method, the study is expected to provide a comprehensive portrayal of how the principal performs managerial functions in optimizing learning communities as a strategy to improve learning quality in primary schools.

### **3. Results and Discussion**

SD Negeri 1 Kalipang is a public primary school located in Kalipang Village, Rembang Regency, under the supervision of the local Education Office. The school serves students from predominantly rural backgrounds, with diverse academic abilities and socio-economic conditions. SD Negeri 1 Kalipang implements the Merdeka Curriculum, which emphasizes student-centered learning, teacher collaboration, and continuous professional development. Prior to the implementation of the learning community program, instructional practices tended to be individual and teacher-centered, with limited opportunities for structured collaboration among teachers. Academic supervision and professional development activities were mainly conducted in a conventional manner, focusing on administrative compliance rather than reflective practice. Recognizing these challenges, the school principal initiated the learning community program as a

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strategic effort to improve instructional quality through collaborative learning, peer discussion, and shared problem-solving. The school environment, leadership commitment, and teachers' willingness to improve collectively became important contextual factors supporting the implementation of the learning community program.

This study employed a qualitative case study approach to explore the role of the school principal as a manager in improving learning quality through learning communities. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, classroom and meeting observations, and document analysis. Interviews were conducted with the school principal (KS) and two teachers (G1 and G2) who were actively involved in the learning community program. The interview process was carried out face-to-face at the school between July 25–28, 2025. Each interview lasted approximately 30–45 minutes and focused on planning, implementation, resource management, and the perceived impact of the learning community program. To ensure data credibility, interview findings were triangulated with observation notes and relevant school documents, including program plans and meeting records. The main interview questions used to guide the data collection process are summarized in Table 1, which outlines the key aspects explored during the interviews.

Table 1. Interview Guiding Questions

No.	Aspect Explored	Interview Questions
1	Program Planning	How was the learning community program planned and what considerations were taken into account?
2	Principal's Role	How does the principal act as a manager in organizing and leading the learning community?
3	Resource Management	How are human and material resources organized to support the program?
4	Teacher Participation	How do teachers participate in and respond to the learning community activities?
5	Program Impact	What changes have occurred in teaching practices and learning quality after the program implementation?
6	Challenges	What obstacles are encountered during the implementation of the learning community program?

### ***Strategic and Operational Planning of the Learning Community Program***

In planning the learning community program at SD Negeri 1 Kalipang, the school principal began by identifying learning needs and challenges faced by teachers. The initial step involved conducting open discussions with all teachers to map out the issues occurring in their classrooms. Based on the interview with the school principal (KS), he stated: "In planning the learning community program, the first step I take is inviting all teachers to sit together and map out what they need in the learning process. I do not want this program to be merely a formality but to genuinely address the problems they face in the classroom" (KS, July 28, 2025). Observational data showed that the initial discussion facilitated by the principal was highly participatory, with teachers actively contributing ideas while the principal guided the discussion to remain focused on the intended goals.

### ***Programs Designed within the Learning Community***

The learning community program designed by the principal focuses on enhancing teachers' pedagogical competencies through regular discussion forums, technology-based training, and model classes. These programs were designed with the involvement of all teachers and educational staff to ensure relevance to actual classroom challenges. The principal explained: "I designed this learning community program to truly meet teachers' needs, not merely as a formal activity. So before determining the types of activities, I conducted a needs analysis, listened to teachers' input, and observed the learning challenges they faced" (KS, July 28, 2025). The program was not only formulated based on teachers' needs but also aligned with the broader educational context. As a result, the program consisted of structured activities with clearly defined roles for each participating teacher.

### ***Organization of Resources and Task Distribution***

The principal demonstrated strong managerial competence in organizing human resources, materials, and time to support learning community activities. Task distribution among teachers was conducted clearly and systematically, enabling each teacher to contribute according to their expertise. During the interview, the principal stated: "For human resources, I assign tasks according to teachers' abilities and experience. Those who understand technology better are asked to help prepare presentation materials or manage the administrative aspects of the learning community. Teachers with longer teaching experience are designated as discussion facilitators" (KS, July 28, 2025). Observations supported this statement, revealing well-coordinated teamwork. Each meeting of the learning community ran smoothly, with tasks distributed evenly to ensure participation from all members.

### ***Effectiveness of Resource Utilization***

Resources at SD Negeri 1 Kalipang were utilized optimally by maximizing existing school facilities such as projectors, whiteboards, and internet access to support instructional activities. The principal ensured that no resources were wasted and that all activities were funded in alignment with the allocated budget. As KS stated: "We ensure that the use of resources is effective meaning appropriate and efficient meaning not wasteful yet producing optimal results" (KS, July 28, 2025). Both Teacher 1 (G1) and Teacher 2 (G2) confirmed that the facilities provided were always ready on time and did not disrupt learning community activities. They also expressed feeling well-supported by the transparent and effective resource management.

### ***Improvement of Teacher Competence and Collaboration***

Findings revealed a significant improvement in teacher competence, particularly in the use of technology-based instructional media. Teacher 1 (G1) shared: "After participating in the learning community program, I began trying project-based learning and creating interactive teaching materials. Students became more

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enthusiastic and asked more questions” (G1, July 28, 2025). Teacher collaboration also intensified through good-practice sharing forums, model classes, and discussions that strengthened collegial relationships. Teacher 2 (G2) added: “We feel we are not alone in facing classroom problems. Our weekly forum is like a place to share struggles and learn together. We exchange experiences and solutions even ones I had never thought of before” (G2, July 28, 2025).

### ***Impact of the Learning Community Program on Learning Quality***

Observations indicated that active teacher participation in the learning community positively influenced classroom learning quality. Teachers were more enthusiastic in applying new methods and more creative in developing instructional materials. This improvement was reflected in students’ test results, which showed a notable increase. Teacher 2 (G2) explained: “Since implementing the learning community program, students’ test scores have improved, especially in the Indonesian language class I teach. Students are more enthusiastic and actively ask questions” (G2, July 28, 2025).

### ***Research Findings Summary***

Based on the data analysis, the following key findings emerged, highlighting the contributing factors and challenges in implementing the Learning Community Program at SD Negeri 1 Kalipang. These findings reflect the actual conditions observed during the research process and provide a comprehensive picture of how the program was implemented in practice. The data were obtained from multiple sources to ensure accuracy and depth of understanding. Table 1 below summarizes the findings derived from interviews, observations, and document analysis, which were systematically analyzed to capture both strengths and areas that require further improvement.

Table 2. Summary of Research Findings

No.	Factor	Findings
1	Learning Community	Increased teacher engagement and strengthened collaboration among teachers.
2	Program Planning	Systematic planning based on teacher needs and instructional challenges.
3	Resource Organization	Optimal resource organization with clear task distribution among teachers and staff.
4	Teacher Competence Improvement	Teachers became more competent in using technology, developing materials, and applying new instructional methods.

### ***Interpretation of Findings***

Based on the findings presented above, the Learning Community Program has had a significant positive impact on teacher engagement and collaboration. The program not only strengthened teachers’ technical skills but also enhanced communication among colleagues, which in turn improved classroom learning quality. These

findings align with theoretical perspectives stating that collaboration within learning communities enriches teaching practices and enhances student learning outcomes (DuFour & Eaker, 2018). In terms of planning, the program was designed with careful consideration of teachers' specific needs and classroom challenges. This demonstrates that needs-based planning strongly influences program quality. Furthermore, optimal resource organization with clear task division ensured that each individual had a defined role and could contribute effectively. Thus, the successful implementation of the program was largely driven by effective coordination and efficient resource utilization.

### ***Discussion***

#### ***The Principal's Role in the Strategic and Operational Planning of the Learning Community Program***

Based on the findings at SD Negeri 1 Kalipang, the school principal plays a crucial role in the strategic and operational planning of the learning community program. The principal seeks to identify teachers' needs through a bottom-up approach, involving teachers directly in mapping classroom learning problems. This differs from the dominant top-down approach found in earlier studies, where principals formulated programs without substantial teacher involvement (Supriyadi, 2020). In this study, the principal adopted a more collaborative method by organizing discussion forums to ensure that the planned programs aligned with real needs in the field. Through these discussions, teachers' challenges were more accurately mapped and translated into relevant programs, such as improving the use of technology in learning.

After the needs assessment, the principal designed a series of activities, including technology training, discussion forums, and benchmarking visits to schools that had successfully implemented innovative instructional methods. These activities were intentionally structured to address the specific challenges faced by teachers in their instructional practices. This aligns with findings that need-based program design enhances the quality of program implementation (DuFour, 2008). The success of such planning demonstrates that the principal's role as a manager capable of navigating, coordinating, and responding to teachers' professional needs is essential for ensuring the sustainability and overall effectiveness of learning community programs.

#### ***The Principal's Role in Organizing Resources***

In this study, the principal optimized existing resources through effective organization of human resources, materials, and time. The principal actively delegated tasks to teachers based on their competencies; for instance, teachers with strong technological skills were assigned to facilitate digital media training. This task distribution created efficiency in implementing learning community activities and ensured that each teacher contributed according to their abilities (Rahman, 2019). Furthermore, the principal ensured that required facilities such as projectors,

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whiteboards, and internet access were available prior to each activity. This minimized disruptions and supported the smooth execution of learning community meetings. Effective organization of resources is essential, as Hidayah (2023) notes that proper resource management fosters a conducive learning environment.

### ***The Principal's Role in Guiding and Motivating Teachers***

The principal also played a significant role in providing clear direction and motivating teachers to actively participate in the learning community. In this study, the principal employed a communicative approach by clearly articulating the goals, procedures, and benefits of the program. The principal offered guidance not only during formal meetings but also through informal conversations in the teachers' lounge to discuss challenges encountered when implementing new instructional methods. This approach proved effective in strengthening relationships between the principal and teachers and in creating a supportive atmosphere for collaboration (Sari, 2021). Additionally, the principal recognized teachers who actively contributed to the learning community by offering verbal appreciation during meetings or providing opportunities to attend external training. Such non-material motivation was found to be more effective in increasing teacher engagement than financial incentives (Mulyasa, 2020).

### ***The Principal's Role in Supervising and Evaluating the Program***

Supervision and evaluation are essential in ensuring the sustainability and effectiveness of the learning community program. The principal conducted active supervision by participating directly in each learning community meeting, not merely as an observer but as an active participant. This enabled the principal to monitor discussion dynamics, content quality, and teacher engagement firsthand. In addition, the principal used evaluation tools such as assessment rubrics and questionnaires to gather feedback from teachers after each session (Hidayah, 2022). The evaluation results were then used to determine whether the program progressed according to its intended goals and to identify areas requiring improvement. For example, if the evaluation showed limited teacher participation in discussions, the principal could design strategies to enhance teacher engagement in subsequent meetings. This participatory evaluation approach fostered accountability and ensured continuous improvement in learning quality (Sutrisno & Hidayah, 2022).

### ***Comparison with Previous Studies***

Compared to previous studies, this research highlights several notable distinctions in the principal's approach to managing learning communities. The bottom-up approach involving teachers in every phase of planning and evaluation sets this study apart from earlier research that generally applied top-down models (Rahman, 2019). Moreover, the principal at SD Negeri 1 Kalipang demonstrated greater flexibility in organizing resources and emphasized non-material motivation focused on recognition and appreciation of teachers' contributions an approach shown to be more effective in fostering collaborative spirit (Hidayah, 2023)

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#### 4. Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study conducted at SD Negeri 1 Kalipang, it can be concluded that the role of the school principal as a manager is highly significant in improving the quality of learning through the implementation of a learning community. The principal successfully managed and directed human resources, planned relevant programs, and optimized available facilities to support teachers' professional development. Collaboration between the principal and teachers in designing, implementing, and evaluating the learning community program has contributed to a substantial improvement in the overall quality of learning.

The learning community program, designed through the involvement of all school stakeholders, not only enhanced teachers' pedagogical competencies but also strengthened their engagement in the teaching-learning process. Although challenges remain particularly related to the limited number of certified teachers these can be mitigated through continuous training and sustained professional capacity-building efforts. This study provides an important contribution by illustrating how effective school leadership can enhance educational quality through the systematic and collaborative management of learning communities. Therefore, the findings serve as a valuable reference for other schools seeking to implement similar programs to improve the quality of learning within their institutions.

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How to cite this article:

Sugiharti., Nyoman, N. A., & Prayito, M. (2026). The Role of the School Principal as a Manager in Improving the Quality of Learning Through Learning Communities at SD Negeri 1 Kalipang, Rembang Regency. *Journal of Educational Sciences*, 10(1), 970-982.

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