



# 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 School Principals and Teachers in Maximized Education Quality in The Era of Independent Learning in Achieving Indonesia's Vision 2045

Riska Hartanti\*, Anam Sutopo, Sofyan Anif

Master of Elementary Education, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Muhammadiyah University of Surakarta, 57169, Indonesia

### ARTICLE INFO

#### Article history:

Received: 21 Nov 2025

Revised: 19 Des 2025

Accepted: 24 Des 2025

Published online: 05 Jan 2026

#### Keywords:

Educational Quality Management,  
Freedom to Learn,  
Principal-Teacher Collaboration,  
Independent Curriculum,  
Golden Indonesia 2045

#### \* Corresponding author:

E-mail: Riska.hartantie@gmail.com

#### Article Doi:

<https://doi.org/10.31258/jes.10.1.p.1051-1061>

This is an open access article under the [CC BY-  
SA](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/) license.



### ABSTRACT

This study examines the collaborative role of school principals and teachers in managing educational quality within the Merdeka Belajar era as a strategic effort to achieve the Golden Indonesia 2045 Vision. Using a qualitative literature study approach, the findings reveal that the effective implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum is strongly influenced by the synergy between principals' collaborative instructional leadership and teachers' pedagogical autonomy. Principals function as facilitators who promote continuous professional development, encourage reflective instructional practices, and optimize the use of assessment data to enhance learning outcomes, while teachers design differentiated, student-centered learning that strengthens the Pancasila Student Profile. The analysis also highlights that alignment across planning, implementation, and evaluation particularly through the development of a data-driven Education Unit Operational Curriculum (KOSP) serves as a strategic bridge connecting national educational policies to classroom practices, thereby ensuring consistency in quality improvement efforts. Despite these positive developments, the study identifies persistent challenges such as limited resources, uneven digital readiness, and administrative burdens that may hinder optimal collaboration. Overall, the study confirms that sustainable, participatory, and innovation-oriented quality management is essential for developing superior human resources capable of supporting Indonesia's long-term national aspirations toward 2045.

## 1. Introduction

The Golden Indonesia 2045 vision makes education the primary foundation for creating a generation that is intelligent, character-driven, creative, and able to compete globally (Bappenas, 2020). Achieving this vision requires education

quality management that ensures the continuous fulfillment and improvement of National Education Standards at the educational institution level (PP No. 57 of 2021). In this regard, educational quality is measured not only by academic achievement but also by character development, 21st-century skills, and student readiness to face global challenges (Denico, 2025).

In response to various issues of educational quality and relevance, the government launched the Merdeka Belajar policy, which grants educational institutions greater freedom to organize their curriculum, learning processes, and assessments in a more flexible and student-focused manner (Kemendikbudristek, 2024). Through the Independent Curriculum, National Assessment, Education Report Card, and the Independent Teaching Platform, schools are expected to implement changes in teaching methods that are more contextual, diverse, and oriented toward strengthening the character of Pancasila students (Kemendikbudristek, 2024). Therefore, managing educational quality in the Independent Learning era requires a system of planning, implementation, assessment, and continuous improvement linked to these policies (Wahyuni, 2025).

In the context of educational quality management based on Independent Learning, principals and teachers are crucial figures influencing the success of implementation at the school level (Hidayat & Zulfikar, 2023). Principals play a leadership role in the learning process, responsible for building a vision and culture of quality, managing resources, creating professional development for teachers, and encouraging learning innovations in accordance with the principles of Independent Learning. On the other hand, teachers serve as the primary implementers of learning, designing varied learning experiences, using formative and summative assessments appropriately, and creating meaningful learning experiences for students to achieve the core competencies and character of Pancasila Students (Denico, 2025).

Several studies have shown that the implementation of the Independent Curriculum and the Independent Learning policy has a positive impact on improving the quality of the learning process, student creativity, and active participation in the classroom (Denico, 2025). Other research indicates that collaborative, participatory, and learning-focused leadership by principals can improve teacher performance and the quality of learning (Marniawarsih, 2025). Furthermore, collaboration between principals and teachers has been shown to help strengthen a culture of quality, improve school program planning, and implement more effective academic supervision (Seruni, 2023).

However, most of these studies tend to treat the Merdeka Belajar policy, education quality management, and collaboration between principals and teachers as separate variables or simply link two aspects, such as principal leadership and teacher performance, without integrating them within the context of Merdeka Belajar-based quality management (Marniawarsih, 2025). On the other hand, various policy documentation and conceptual papers emphasize the importance of collaboration between various parties principals, teachers, committees, and the community in the

---

---

education quality assurance system, but this is not supported by in-depth empirical evidence at the school level (Kemendikbudristek, 2024). This indicates a gap between formulated policies and existing quality management practices, particularly regarding how collaboration between principals and teachers is implemented to support the achievement of Indonesia's golden generation by 2045 (Wahyuni, 2025).

From the above explanation, a research gap is evident in the lack of empirical studies that specifically and in-depth examine educational quality management based on Freedom to Learn through collaboration between principals and teachers in preparing Indonesia's golden generation 2045 within the context of specific educational units. This study aims to bridge this gap by analyzing how the planning, implementation, and evaluation of educational quality management are carried out collaboratively by principals and teachers under the Freedom to Learn policy framework. It is hoped that the results of this study can provide theoretical contributions to the development of studies on educational quality management and instructional leadership, as well as practical recommendations for strengthening collaboration between principals and teachers in improving educational quality towards Indonesia Emas 2045 (Bappenas, 2020).

## **2. Methodology**

The research method in this article adopts a qualitative approach through a literature review. A qualitative approach was chosen because the focus of the study is to gain an in-depth understanding of concepts, policies, and empirical findings related to educational quality management in the Freedom to Learn (Merdeka Belajar) era, as well as the collaboration between principals and teachers in preparing Indonesia's golden generation for 2045, rather than statistically testing hypotheses. The literature review involved a series of activities such as collecting, critically reading, recording, and synthesizing various relevant scholarly sources, including journal articles, books, policy documents, and previously published research reports.

The data in this study were obtained entirely from written secondary sources collected from several academic databases. A total of 18 journal articles were analyzed, consisting of 10 Scopus-indexed articles, 6 SINTA-indexed articles, and 2 articles from other reputable databases such as Google Scholar and ERIC. In addition, 8 supporting sources were used, including academic books on education management and policy, laws and regulations (such as the National Education System Law and regulations related to Merdeka Belajar), official government documents, and relevant conference proceedings. Source selection was based on recency (primarily within the last 5–10 years), relevance to the research focus, and the credibility of the publishing institution.

Data analysis utilized qualitative descriptive analysis. The collected literature was organized into major themes, including: (1) the concept and principles of education quality management, (2) the policy framework of Freedom to Learn and the

---

Independent Curriculum, (3) the collaborative roles of principals and teachers, and (4) strategies for preparing Indonesia's golden generation in 2045. Data reduction was then conducted by selecting the most relevant information, organizing categories and subthemes, and removing overlapping or unrelated content. The reduced data were presented in a structured narrative that illustrates the interconnectedness between educational quality management, the Merdeka Belajar policy, and principal–teacher collaboration. From this process, the researcher drew conclusions regarding patterns, trends, research gaps, and theoretical and practical implications for implementing Merdeka Belajar-based quality management to support the realization of Indonesia's 2045 vision.

### 3. Results and Discussion

#### *Results*

The results of the literature review indicate that educational quality management based on Merdeka Belajar represents not only a shift in administrative procedures, but a transformation designed to improve measurable aspects of educational outcomes aligned with the Vision of Golden Indonesia 2045. This transformation can be observed through indicators such as improved student literacy numeracy, strengthened character aligned with the Pancasila Student Profile, and increased teacher instructional competence. Several studies show that schools implementing the Merdeka Curriculum with strong leadership support record improved formative assessment results, higher student participation in project-based learning, and increased teacher readiness to differentiate instruction key predictors of long-term competency development (Bappenas, 2025; Kemdikbud, 2024). Thus, the shift toward student-centered learning is not merely conceptual but reflects observable improvements in learning quality.

The causal relationship between quality management and leadership is evident when examining the role of principals. Research demonstrates that principals who practice collaborative instructional leadership such as ensuring the use of National Assessment data, guiding KOSP development, and sustaining teacher learning communities to produce measurable improvements in school performance indicators. These include increased teacher lesson-planning quality, more consistent use of formative assessments, and improved student mastery of basic competencies (Hidayat & Zulfikar, 2023; Fawzi, 2024). This indicates that leadership actions are not merely administrative tasks; they *directly* influence the quality of instructional processes, which in turn shape learning outcomes relevant to Indonesia's 2045 vision.

The first literature synthesis relates to strengthening curriculum management within the Merdeka Belajar framework. Several studies at the elementary and secondary school levels have shown that effective management of the Independent Curriculum is demonstrated through the development of an Educational Unit Operational Curriculum (KOSP), which integrates the school's vision with the Pancasila Student

---

---

profile, mapping learning outcomes, and planning differentiated learning according to student needs (Hadi, 2023; Widyastuti & Kurniawan, 2024).

The KOSP document, created collaboratively by principals and teachers, helps translate curriculum objectives into annual programs, semester programs, teaching modules, and Pancasila Student profile development projects, thus making learning quality more measurable and aligned with national policy. Other research confirms that schools that utilize data from the National Assessment and Education Report Card to update the KOSP and quality program plans tend to experience improvements in literacy, numeracy, and learning climate indicators, although the extent of this improvement varies across educational units (Fawzi, 2024).

The second study showed that collaborative, learning-focused leadership from principals plays a crucial role in advancing quality management in line with Merdeka Belajar (Freedom to Learn). Research across various contexts in Indonesia shows that principals who act as instructional leaders rather than simply administrators are more effective in fostering a culture of quality within the school environment by strengthening a shared vision, supporting teacher professional development, and implementing constructive academic supervision (Hidayat & Zulfikar, 2023; Setyawati, 2023).

These principals actively initiate forums such as teacher learning communities, regular learning reflection meetings, and discussions on assessment results, so that teachers feel supported in implementing new learning strategies and addressing learning challenges faced by students. International research on school leadership also shows similar findings, indicating that participatory and distributed leadership are positively associated with improved teaching quality and learning outcomes, as decisions and innovations emerge from teacher involvement (Nurmala, 2024).

At the same time, the analysis shows that collaboration between principals and teachers in the quality assurance process occurs at various stages: planning, implementation, monitoring, and follow-up. In the planning stage, collaboration is evident through the development of the school's vision and mission, the School's Strategic Plan (KOSP), the school's work plan, and the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Program, which involves teachers as members of the program development and development team (Rusmaini & Putri, 2024). In the implementation stage, principals support teachers by providing time for joint planning, facilitating training, and assisting them in the teaching process, while teachers implement differentiated learning, active learning models, and formative assessments in accordance with the principles of Freedom to Learn (Denico, 2025).

In the monitoring and evaluation stage, both parties reflect on learning outcomes and student feedback using national evaluation instruments, classroom assessments, and internal school quality instruments, then develop improvement plans that are agreed upon by all parties (Fawzi, 2024). This collaborative pattern is described in several journals as a good governance practice in school environments, as quality

---

decisions are made through dialogue and data, not solely from unilateral instructions (Yuliani & Pratama, 2024).

Subsequent studies focused on the role of teachers as primary implementers in learning oriented toward freedom of learning and quality. Both domestic and international literature demonstrates that teachers who have pedagogical autonomy in the Independent Curriculum are able to design learning that is more relevant to students' contexts. They use collaborative, project-based, and problem-based learning models, and integrate literacy and numeracy across various subjects (Denico, 2025; Febrianti, 2025).

Several studies have linked granting teachers the authority to choose textbooks, media, and assessment strategies, along with principal support through training and supervision, to increased student participation, reduced classroom boredom, and strengthened cooperative and responsible attitudes (Hadi, 2023; Simarmata, 2024). International findings on teacher agency in curriculum reform also confirm that when teachers are viewed as trusted agents of change, rather than simply implementers of policy, innovation in learning and commitment to quality are more likely to increase (Nurmala, 2024).

Specifically, several articles highlight that a mutually supportive and equal working relationship between principals and teachers is crucial for the sustainability of quality management. Research on collaboration between principals and teachers at the elementary school level indicates that open communication, recognition of teacher initiative, and a mutually beneficial feedback process contribute to teachers' sense of ownership of the school quality program and their willingness to actively participate in its implementation (Rusmaini & Putri, 2024).

This collaboration is also evident in the management of the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project, where the principal provides support in the form of policies and facilities, while teachers are responsible for planning and implementing the project with students, making the activity an integral part of the school's quality strategy, not simply an additional burden (Hadi, 2023). In some good practice reports, this collaboration even extends to involve committees and parents, for example in school literacy programs, inspiration classes, and career programs, all of which contribute to a richer and more meaningful learning ecosystem for students (Yuliani & Pratama, 2024).

Literature research also links educational quality management following Merdeka Belajar (Freedom to Learn) with the broader agenda of preparing Indonesia's golden generation in 2045. Policy documents and conceptual articles emphasize that current educational quality will influence the capabilities of Indonesia's human resources in 2045, particularly in literacy, numeracy, character, and 21st-century competencies (Bappenas, 2025).

The Merdeka Curriculum, which focuses on strengthening the profile of Pancasila Students, is considered a strategic tool for shaping a generation that is religious,

---

---

virtuous, independent, cooperative, critical-thinking, and creative, which is an essential foundation for achieving a Golden Indonesia (Simarmata, 2024). In this context, quality management involving close collaboration between principals and teachers ensures that these principles are not only written in policy documents but also truly implemented in learning and school culture. In other words, collaboratively managed educational quality will bridge the grand vision of Golden Indonesia 2045 with the reality of educational practice at the school level (Fawzi, 2024).

However, this research also highlights limitations and challenges that must be addressed to maximize the potential of quality management oriented toward Independent Learning. Several studies reveal that not all schools have sufficient resources, whether in terms of facilities, access to technology, or the number and qualifications of teaching staff, to optimally implement the Independent Curriculum (Hadi, 2023; Maulidin, 2024). Variations in principal leadership capacity and teacher preparedness lead to significant differences in the quality of implementation on the ground; some schools have successfully used the Independent Learning policy to innovate in quality, while others have simply replaced the curriculum document without significant changes in teaching practices (Denico, 2025; Rusmaini & Putri, 2024). Furthermore, several studies have shown that administrative burdens, mounting reporting demands, and a lack of intensive mentoring reduce opportunities for reflection and collaboration, which should be at the heart of Merdeka Belajar (Freedom to Learn) and participatory quality management (Wahyuni, 2025).

Overall, the findings from this literature review indicate that educational quality management based on Merdeka Belajar (Freedom to Learn), implemented through synergy between principals and teachers, is a crucial prerequisite for realizing relevant, inclusive, and competitive education, preparing Indonesia's golden generation for 2045. Patterns seen in various national and international journals indicate that schools that successfully integrate data-driven quality planning, collaborative instructional leadership, and teacher empowerment as agents of change tend to experience improvements in both learning processes and outcomes (Nurmala, 2024; Fawzi, 2024). However, to expand this success, consistent policy support, capacity building for principals and teachers, and the development of mentoring and supervision mechanisms that encourage collective reflection, not just administrative compliance, are needed. These findings emphasize the importance of developing an education quality management model based on Independent Learning that prioritizes collaboration between principals and teachers, and emphasizes its strategic role in supporting the Golden Indonesia 2045 agenda (Bappenas, 2025).

### ***Discussion***

The results of literature research indicate that educational quality management, based on Merdeka Belajar (Freedom to Learn), shifts the focus from merely meeting administrative standards to improving the learning process, focusing on students'

---

centers, sustainability, and adapting to the demands of the 21st century. This shift aligns with the understanding that educational quality is measured not only by test scores but also by students' literacy, numeracy, character, and critical thinking skills (Bappenas, 2025). The integration of the Merdeka Curriculum with the school quality assurance system demonstrates that documents such as the Educational Unit Operational Curriculum, School Work Plan, and Quality Improvement Plan are essential tools for realizing the vision of Golden Indonesia 2045 in daily school practice. In this context, Merdeka Belajar can be understood as a policy framework that provides space for autonomy, while quality management plays a regulatory role to ensure that autonomy remains directed and accountable (Wahyuni, 2025).

The relationship between quality management based on the Freedom to Learn (Merdeka Belajar) policy and the roles of principals and teachers is strongly evident in numerous national and international publications. Research on leadership in learning shows that today's principals function beyond mere administrators handling the bureaucratic aspects of schools, but are required to act as instructional leaders focused on improving the quality of teaching and learning (Hidayat & Zulfikar, 2023). Such principals are actively involved in the process of developing the KOSP (School Planning and Development Plan), encouraging the use of data from the National Assessment and Education Report Cards, and organizing teacher learning communities to reflect on learning outcomes and design improvement measures (Fawzi, 2024).

Similarly, the role of teachers shows a causative link to improved student competencies. Literature consistently reports that when teachers are granted autonomy supported by adequate training, their instructional practices become more innovative, resulting in heightened student engagement, improved motivation, and increased mastery of higher-order thinking skills (Denico, 2025; Febrianti, 2025). For instance, schools that regularly apply differentiated instruction demonstrate higher student retention of concepts and stronger problem-solving abilities competencies essential for preparing productive and competitive future generations. This reinforces that teacher empowerment is not merely symbolic; it contributes to tangible improvements in learning processes and student outcomes.

Collaboration between principals and teachers also shows measurable effects on school quality improvement. Schools that engage in participatory curriculum development, collaborative analysis of student assessment results, and joint planning of Pancasila Student Profile Projects demonstrate higher consistency in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum and show gradual improvement in school-level indicators such as student discipline, reduced learning loss, and strengthened school culture (Rusmaini & Putri, 2024). These outcomes align with distributed leadership principles, where shared accountability leads to collective improvements in instructional quality and school performance.

In the context of Indonesia's 2045 vision, these collaborative practices directly support the development of human resources expected to be literate, critical, creative, and capable of lifelong learning. Therefore, the synergy between

---

---

principals and teachers in quality management is not merely descriptive. It produces measurable impacts aligning with national development targets. However, the literature also highlights a gap between expected outcomes and actual practice. Many principals still lack competency in data-driven leadership, and some teachers interpret Merdeka Belajar superficially, leading to minimal impact on student competencies (Hadi, 2023; Maulidin, 2024). These gaps signal that achieving long-term national goals requires system-level support, continued capacity building, and reduced administrative burden to allow schools to focus on improving learning quality.

Overall, the discussion confirms that the causal link between leadership, teacher autonomy, and educational quality is strongly supported by empirical patterns across publications. The success of Merdeka Belajar-based quality management in contributing toward the Golden Indonesia 2045 Vision depends on how effectively school actors implement collaborative and data-informed practices that directly improve student learning outcomes and school performance indicators.

#### **4. Conclusion**

The conclusion of this study indicates that educational quality management based on the "Freedom to Learn" principle can only be effective if there is strong collaboration between the principal and teachers throughout all stages: planning, implementation, evaluation, and continuous quality improvement. The principal acts as the driving force through visionary and participatory leadership, setting quality direction, managing the development of the Educational Unit Operational Curriculum, supporting teacher learning communities, and ensuring that assessment data and educational reports are used as the basis for decision-making. Meanwhile, teachers are the primary actors in implementing the "Freedom to Learn" principle through varied learning practices, the selection of appropriate methods and media, and formative assessments that encourage student engagement and independence.

The overall literature analysis confirms that the consistent integration of quality management with the "Freedom to Learn" policy, supported by a culture of reflection, professional discussion, and mutual trust, can improve the quality of educational processes and outcomes. This improvement is evident in both the mastery of core competencies and the strengthening of character traits aligned with the Pancasila Student Profile. Thus, schools are not merely policy implementers, but develop as learning communities that continuously strive to improve themselves to prepare a generation of faithful, noble, critical, creative, independent, and collaborative individuals, moving towards a Golden Indonesia 2045. However, challenges persist in the form of disparities in leadership capacity, teacher preparedness, and resource availability. Therefore, capacity building, ongoing mentoring, and a reduction in administrative burdens are necessary to ensure that the primary focus of education is truly on improving the quality of learning.

---

---

## References

- Bappenas. (2025). *Dari pemerataan hingga Merdeka Belajar menuju generasi emas 2045*. Badan Perencanaan Pembangunan Nasional.
- Denico, A. (2025). Kurikulum Merdeka, mutu pendidikan, dan pendidikan dasar. *Jurnal Pendidikan Dasar*, 10(2), 101–115.
- Febrianti, A. (2025). Menciptakan generasi emas melalui implementasi pendidikan bermutu. *Jurnal Ilmu Pendidikan*, 18(1), 45–60.
- Fawzi, F. R. (2024). Peran Merdeka Belajar dalam praktik manajemen yang berorientasi mutu. *Jurnal Didaktika*, 9(2), 120–134.
- Hadi, A. (2023). Implementasi manajemen Kurikulum Merdeka dalam meningkatkan mutu pendidikan. *Jurnal Literasi Pendidikan*, 7(1), 25–38.
- Hidayat, M., & Zulfikar, A. (2023). Kepemimpinan kolaboratif kepala sekolah dalam meningkatkan mutu pembelajaran. *Jurnal Kepemimpinan Pendidikan*, 5(2), 55–70.
- Kementerian Pendidikan, Kebudayaan, Riset, dan Teknologi. (2024). *Kurikulum Merdeka dan implementasi kebijakan Merdeka Belajar di satuan pendidikan*. Kemendikbudristek.
- Maulidin, S. (2024). Manajemen mutu pendidikan dalam penerapan Kurikulum Merdeka. *Action: Jurnal Manajemen Pendidikan*, 6(1), 11–24.
- Nurmala, E. (2024). Improving the quality of vocational learning through the independent curriculum: A literature review. *Sabiq: Journal of Vocational Education*, 3(1), 30–44.
- PKIM UIN Sunan Kalijaga. (2025). *Generasi emas 2045: Peran strategis pendidikan hari ini*. PKIM UIN Sunan Kalijaga.
- Rusmaini, R., & Putri, D. (2024). Kolaborasi guru dan kepala sekolah dalam menjaga mutu pendidikan di sekolah dasar. *Pendas: Jurnal Ilmiah Pendidikan Dasar*, 9(3), 210–224.
- Seruni, S. (2023). Implementasi ISO 21001 sebagai strategi peningkatan mutu melalui kebijakan Merdeka Belajar. *Jurnal Manajemen Pendidikan*, 12(2), 88–102.
- Setyawati, E. (2023). Peran kepala sekolah dalam pengembangan kurikulum dan peningkatan mutu pembelajaran. *El-Idare: Jurnal Manajemen Pendidikan Islam*, 8(1), 67–82.
- Simarmata, A. (2024). Mempersiapkan generasi emas Indonesia tahun 2045 melalui penguatan mutu pendidikan. *Jurnal Ilmu Pendidikan dan Masyarakat*, 4(2), 95–110.
- Undang-Undang Republik Indonesia Nomor 20 Tahun 2003 tentang Sistem Pendidikan Nasional.
- Peraturan Pemerintah Republik Indonesia Nomor 57 Tahun 2021 tentang Standar Nasional Pendidikan.
- Wahyuni, S. (2025). Kebijakan Merdeka Belajar dalam perspektif manajemen pendidikan. *Research and Development Journal of Education*, 11(1), 15–29.
- Widyastuti, D., & Kurniawan, H. (2024). Manajemen mutu pendidikan dalam kerangka Merdeka Belajar di sekolah dasar. *Jurnal Manajemen Kurikulum dan Pendidikan*, 5(2), 140–155.
-

---

Yuliani, N., & Pratama, R. (2024). Kolaborasi kepala sekolah, guru, dan komite dalam penjaminan mutu pendidikan. *Jurnal Pendidikan Dasar Nusantara*, 9(1), 33–48.

How to cite this article:

Hartanti, R., Sutopo, A., & Anif, S. (2026). The Role of School Principals and Teachers in Maximized Education Quality in The Era of Independent Learning in Achieving Indonesia's Vision 2045. *Journal of Educational Sciences*, 10(1), 1051-1061.