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Innovative Principal Leadership in Managing an Effective Learning Environment: A Case Study of SD Inpres 2 Besusu

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A B S T R A C T

This study aims to describe the innovative leadership of the principal in managing an effective learning environment at SD Inpres 2 Besusu. The study employed a qualitative approach using a descriptive method. The research subjects consisted of the principal, teachers, and educational staff. Data collection techniques were conducted through observation, semi structured interviews, questionnaires, and documentation, while data analysis used the interactive model of Miles and Huberman, which includes data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The results of the study indicate that the principal's innovative leadership contributes very positively to the creation of an effective learning environment, as reflected in teachers' high perceptions of the principal's leadership and learning environment management. Interview findings revealed that the principal was able to encourage teachers' creativity, support the use of educational technology, build harmonious social relationships, and create a safe, comfortable, and conducive learning atmosphere. The innovations implemented included the development of digital based learning, the organization of training sessions and workshops, as well as improvements to the school's physical environment to support learning comfort. These findings indicate that the principal's innovative leadership plays an important role in improving the effectiveness of the learning environment through strengthening teacher motivation, student engagement, and the quality of the learning process in elementary schools.

1. Introduction

Basic education is one of the most important stages in the development of high quality human resources. Elementary schools function not only as institutions for providing basic literacy and numeracy skills but also as platforms for character building, moral value formation, and the development of students' social skills. Therefore, the success of basic education is greatly influenced by various factors,

one of which is the leadership of the school principal. The principal plays a strategic role in directing, mobilizing, and controlling all educational processes within the school. An effective principal is not merely an administrator but also an innovative leader who is capable of anticipating changes, adapting to developments over time, and creating a conducive learning environment for students' growth and development (Nebieridze, 2023; Wati et al., 2022)

Innovative leadership in education refers to a principal's ability to introduce new ideas, implement reforms, and create breakthroughs in school management. Such innovation may include the development of learning strategies, the integration of educational technology, the strengthening of school culture, and more effective resource management. Visionary leadership strategies based on innovation have been proven to improve the quality of learning and encourage positive changes in schools ((Fahma et al., 2024; Heryani et al., 2023). Innovative school leadership also contributes to the development of adaptive and sustainable educational practices that respond to the challenges of the twenty first century (Khoirunnisa et al., 2022).

An effective learning environment is a key factor in supporting the achievement of educational goals. Such an environment is not limited to physical aspects such as classrooms, facilities, and infrastructure but also encompasses the psychological, social, and cultural dimensions that develop within the school. A supportive learning environment encourages students to feel safe, comfortable, and motivated to participate in the learning process. Previous studies have shown that a positive school climate significantly influences student engagement and learning achievement (Nisa et al., 2024; Sardiyanah, 2020). Furthermore, the principal's leadership plays a crucial role in organizing and maintaining a conducive learning environment (Ridho, 2019).

Research has confirmed that transformational and innovative leadership can motivate teachers to be more creative in teaching and create a more engaging learning atmosphere (Dyan Erlisa, 2024; Megawati et al., 2021). In addition, effective school leadership contributes to teacher professionalism, collaboration among school members, and the implementation of student centered learning practices (M Husain et al., 2023). Consequently, the quality of the learning environment is closely associated with the leadership style adopted by the principal.

However, many schools still face challenges related to limited facilities, technological readiness, and the implementation of innovative teaching approaches. Several studies in the Journal of Educational Sciences have reported that school improvement efforts require strong leadership, teacher empowerment, and the integration of technology supported learning environments to enhance educational quality (Riduansyah et al., 2025). Therefore, innovative leadership is increasingly needed to ensure that schools remain adaptive and capable of providing effective learning experiences for all students.

Recent studies have demonstrated that educational innovation plays a significant role in improving the quality of learning in elementary schools. The development

and implementation of innovative learning media not only enhance student engagement but also require strong leadership support from school principals to ensure successful integration into classroom practices. Principals who actively encourage innovation and provide adequate support for teachers contribute to the development of more effective and student centered learning environments (Faiz et al., 2025).

The role of school leadership has also been associated with the successful implementation of educational programs and institutional improvement. Effective principals are expected to possess the ability to formulate strategic policies, motivate teachers, and create a collaborative school culture. Research conducted by (Ansari & Iqbal, 2026) revealed that leadership practices characterized by vision, communication, and innovation significantly influence school effectiveness and educational quality. Therefore, leadership remains a crucial factor in determining the success of school development initiatives.

In addition, school principals play an essential role in fostering a quality culture within educational institutions. A strong quality culture encourages continuous improvement, professional responsibility, and commitment among school members toward achieving educational goals. Studies have shown that leadership grounded in local values and participatory decision making can strengthen organizational culture and improve school performance, particularly in elementary education settings (Rohyadi et al., 2025).

Transformational leadership has likewise been recognized as an important determinant of educational quality. Principals who apply transformational leadership practices are more capable of inspiring teachers, encouraging professional growth, and facilitating effective learning processes. Such leadership contributes positively to teachers' pedagogical competence and supports the implementation of innovative educational practices that enhance student learning outcomes (Sulistyorini & Abdullah, 2025).

Furthermore, instructional leadership supported by systematic planning and data based decision making has been found to improve school effectiveness and learning quality. School leaders who utilize educational data to guide policy formulation and instructional improvement are better positioned to address educational challenges and optimize school performance. Consequently, instructional leadership is increasingly viewed as a critical component of innovative school management and sustainable educational development (Fibrianti et al., 2025).

Despite the growing body of research on educational leadership, most previous studies have focused on specific aspects such as transformational leadership, instructional leadership, teacher performance, school quality, and educational innovation. While these studies have provided valuable insights into the contribution of leadership to educational improvement, limited attention has been given to how innovative principal leadership specifically contributes to the management of an effective learning environment in elementary schools. Moreover, previous studies tend to examine leadership outcomes separately, rather than

exploring the integrated relationship between innovative leadership practices and the physical, social, psychological, and digital dimensions of the learning environment. Therefore, further investigation is needed to understand how innovative school leadership can effectively support the creation of a comprehensive learning environment that enhances educational quality.

SD Inpres 2 Besusu was selected as the research site because it has demonstrated efforts to improve educational quality through leadership initiatives, collaborative school management, and the development of learning programs that support students' academic and non-academic growth. Examining leadership practices within this context provides valuable insights into how innovative leadership can influence the management of learning environments in elementary schools. Therefore, this study aims to explore and analyze the role of innovative principal leadership in managing an effective learning environment at SD Inpres 2 Besusu. The findings are expected to contribute both theoretically to the field of educational leadership and practically to school leaders seeking to improve the quality of learning environments in similar educational settings.

2. Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research approach with a descriptive design. The qualitative approach was selected because the study aimed to explore and understand in depth how the principal's innovative leadership contributes to the management of an effective learning environment at SD Inpres 2 Besusu. Qualitative research enables researchers to investigate social phenomena within their natural settings and to interpret participants' experiences, perceptions, and behaviors comprehensively (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Sugiyono, 2019). This approach has been widely used in educational leadership studies to examine leadership practices and their influence on school effectiveness (Heryani et al., 2023; Nebieridze, 2023).

The research was conducted at SD Inpres 2 Besusu, Palu City, Central Sulawesi, Indonesia. The school was selected purposively because it has implemented various innovations in learning management and school development under the leadership of an active and innovative principal. The research participants consisted of the principal, teachers, and educational staff. The principal served as the key informant because of his direct involvement in planning and implementing school innovations, while teachers and educational staff provided supporting information regarding the implementation and impact of leadership practices on the learning environment.

Data were collected through questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, observations, and documentation. Questionnaires were distributed to teachers to obtain supporting quantitative data regarding perceptions of innovative leadership and learning environment management. Interviews were conducted with the principal, teachers, and educational staff to gain deeper insights into leadership practices and school conditions. Semi-structured interviews were chosen because

they allow flexibility in exploring participants' responses while maintaining consistency with the research objectives (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Documentation data, including school records and activity reports, were also examined to strengthen the validity of the findings through data triangulation.

Data analysis was conducted using the interactive model developed by, which consists of three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. Data validity was ensured through source triangulation, technique triangulation, and member checking to enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings. Through these procedures, the study sought to provide a comprehensive understanding of the role of innovative principal leadership in creating an effective learning environment.

3. Results and Discussion

This section presents the research findings obtained through a series of systematic data collection procedures conducted at SD Inpres 2 Besusu, aimed at examining the principal's innovative leadership in managing an effective learning environment. The data collected during the study were derived from observations, interviews, questionnaires, and documentation provided by the school. As a result, data regarding the profile of the school under study were obtained, namely SD Inpres 2 Besusu, located at Jl. Dr. Wahidin No. 33, East Palu District, Palu, Central Sulawesi, Indonesia. To provide a clearer description of the data collection process, the findings presented in this section were obtained through semi-structured interviews with the principal and teachers, as well as the distribution of questionnaires to teachers. Table 1 and Table 2 present the main interview questions, while Table 3 shows the indicators and sample questionnaire items used in the study, as presented below.

Table 1. Principal Interview Guide

No.	Questions	Interviewee's Response	Notes
1	How do you understand the concept of innovative leadership in schools?		
2	What innovations have you implemented in school management?		
3	What is your role in creating positive changes in the learning environment?		
4	How do you involve teachers and staff in school innovation programs?		
5	What strategies do you apply to manage the physical learning environment to ensure it is comfortable and conducive?		
6	How do you build a harmonious social environment within the school?		
7	How do you maintain students' psychological comfort in the learning process?		
8	Do you encourage the use of technology in learning? If so, in what ways?		

9	What challenges are commonly encountered in implementing innovative leadership?		
10	How do you overcome these challenges?		
11	In your opinion, how does innovative leadership influence the effectiveness of the learning environment?		
12	What impact does leadership innovation have on students' learning motivation?		

In addition to interviews conducted with the principal, the researcher also included an interview guide for teachers, as presented in the following table 2.

Table 2. Teacher Interview Guide

No.	Questions	Interviewee's Response	Notes
1	What is your opinion about the principal's leadership in this school?		
2	Does the principal encourage innovation in teaching and learning?		
3	Which innovation has had the most noticeable impact on teachers?		
4	What is the condition of the school's physical environment after the implementation of innovative programs?		
5	Are social relationships among school members functioning well?		
6	Do students feel comfortable and safe during the learning process?		
7	Is technology utilized in the learning process?		
8	How does the principal support the use of digital media in learning?		
9	Does the principal's innovative leadership influence teachers' motivation to teach?		
10	Has the learning environment become more conducive?		
11	What challenges are experienced in the implementation of school innovations?		
12	What solutions are provided by the principal?		
13	In your opinion, does innovative leadership have an impact on the effectiveness of learning?		
14	What suggestions do you have for improving the management of the learning environment in the future?		

In addition to interviews with the principal and teachers, the researcher also included a questionnaire table for evaluating the principal's performance, as presented in the following table 3.

Table 3. Innovative Leadership of the Principal

No.	Indicators	Yes	No	Notes
1	Has a clear vision for school development	✓		
2	Directs changes toward quality improvement	✓		
3	Encourages new ideas in the learning process	✓		
4	Develops innovative school programs	✓		
5	Is willing to try new strategies	✓		
6	Makes appropriate and timely decisions	✓		
7	Involves teachers and staff in innovation initiatives	✓		

8	Builds open communication	✓		
9	Provides motivation	✓		
10	Gives recognition for achievements	✓		

The management of the physical learning environment is an important aspect in supporting the effectiveness of the teaching and learning process. A conducive physical environment can enhance students' comfort, concentration, and participation during classroom activities. Therefore, several indicators related to classroom conditions and learning facilities were evaluated in this study, as presented in the following Table 4.

Table 4. Management of the Physical Learning Environment

No.	Indicators	Yes	No	Notes
1	Classrooms are clean and suitable for learning	✓		
2	Ventilation and lighting are adequate	✓		
3	The classroom atmosphere is comfortable	✓		

In addition to the physical environment, the social learning environment also plays a significant role in creating a positive atmosphere within the school. Harmonious relationships among students, teachers, and other school members contribute to effective communication and collaboration in the learning process. The results of the assessment of the social learning environment are presented in the following Table 5.

Table 5. Social Learning Environment

No.	Indicators	Yes	No	Notes
1	Harmonious interactions	✓		
2	Teachers provide proper guidance	✓		
3	Mutual respect is practiced	✓		
4	Cooperation among students	✓		

The psychological learning environment is equally important in supporting students' academic and personal development. Students who feel safe, comfortable, and appreciated are more likely to participate actively and achieve better learning outcomes. The evaluation results regarding the psychological learning environment are presented in the following Table 6.

Table 6. Psychological Learning Environment

No.	Indicators	Yes	No	Notes
1	Students feel comfortable at school	✓		
2	Students show enthusiasm for learning	✓		
3	There is no excessive pressure on students	✓		

The integration of technology in education has become an essential component of modern learning environments. The availability of digital facilities and the encouragement of technology utilization can support innovative and effective

learning practices. The findings related to the digital learning environment are presented in the following Table 7.

Table 7. Digital Learning Environment

No.	Indicators	Yes	No	Notes
1	Digital media are used in the learning process	✓		
2	Technological facilities are available	✓		
3	Encourages the utilization of technology	✓		

Principal Evaluation Results

In addition to the interview tables, a questionnaire was also distributed to teachers to assess the principal's performance. The total number of teacher respondents was 14. The calculation results as presented in the following table 8.

Table 8. Teacher Questionnaire Results at SD Inpres 2 Besusu

No.	Assessed Aspects	Total Score (f)	Maximum Score (N)	Percentage (%)	Criteria
1	Innovative Leadership of the Principal	626	700	89.4%	Very High
2	Physical Learning Environment Management	258	280	92.1%	Very High
3	Social Learning Environment	275	280	98.2%	Very High
4	Psychological Learning Environment	266	280	95.0%	Very High
5	Digital Learning Environment	320	350	91.4%	Very High
	Overall Average Percentage			93.22%	Very High

Data collection regarding the principal's innovative leadership in managing an effective learning environment at SD Inpres 2 Besusu was conducted through the distribution of questionnaires to teachers as research respondents. The questionnaire was developed based on several indicators, including the principal's innovative leadership, management of the physical learning environment, social learning environment, psychological learning environment, and digital learning environment. Based on the results of questionnaire data analysis, scores were obtained for each indicator, as presented in the following explanation:

1. In general, the questionnaire results indicate that the principal's innovative leadership falls within the *very high* category, with an average percentage of 93.22% of the maximum possible score. This finding suggests that the principal of SD Inpres 2 Besusu has implemented innovative leadership very effectively.
2. Based on the questionnaire results, the indicator of the principal's innovative leadership obtained a score of 626 out of a maximum score of 700, with a percentage of 89.4%, which falls within the *very high* category. This result indicates that the principal of SD Inpres 2 Besusu has successfully implemented

innovative leadership in carrying out their role as a school leader. It demonstrates that the principal not only performs managerial duties but also acts as a driver of change that leads the school toward progress. Therefore, the principal's innovative leadership becomes one of the key factors in improving the quality of the learning environment at the school.

3. The indicator of physical learning environment management obtained a score of 258 out of a maximum score of 280, with a percentage of 92.1%, categorized as *very high*. This result indicates that the physical learning environment at SD Inpres 2 Besusu has been managed very effectively.
4. The indicator of the social learning environment obtained a score of 275 out of a maximum score of 280, with a percentage of 98.2%, categorized as *very high*. This percentage represents the highest score among all aspects, indicating that the social environment at SD Inpres 2 Besusu is in excellent condition. The social learning environment relates to interactions among school members, such as relationships between the principal and teachers, teachers and students, and interactions among students. A positive social environment creates a harmonious and cooperative school climate, thereby supporting the implementation of effective learning processes.
5. The indicator of the psychological learning environment obtained a score of 266 out of a maximum score of 280, with a percentage of 95%, categorized as *very high*. These findings indicate that the psychological environment at SD Inpres 2 Besusu has been managed very effectively. A supportive psychological environment helps students feel confident, express their opinions freely, and maintain enthusiasm for learning.
6. The indicator of the digital learning environment obtained a score of 320 out of a maximum score of 350, with a percentage of 91.4%, categorized as *very high*. This finding indicates that the utilization of digital technology at SD Inpres 2 Besusu has been implemented very effectively.

Therefore, the findings of this study indicate that the principal's innovative leadership contributes significantly to the creation of an effective learning environment, which ultimately enhances the quality of learning and supports educational success at SD Inpres 2 Besusu.

Teacher Interview Results

Based on interviews conducted with several teachers at SD Inpres 2 Besusu, information was obtained indicating that the principal's leadership plays an important role in encouraging instructional innovation and creating an effective learning environment. Teachers stated that the principal demonstrates a collaborative, open leadership style and supports teacher professional development. One teacher stated that "the principal always listens to teachers' aspirations and encourages us to continue being creative in teaching and learning" (Teacher 1). Another teacher added that "the principal is very wise because he understands both teachers' and students' limitations and always provides solutions" (Teacher 2). These statements indicate that the principal not only performs administrative functions but also serves as a leader who fosters communication and motivates teachers in their work. This finding is consistent with previous studies that reported

that collaborative and participatory leadership contributes positively to teacher performance and school effectiveness (Heryani et al., 2023; Riduansyah et al., 2025).

In promoting instructional innovation, teachers reported that the principal actively provides support through training programs and the integration of technology. One teacher stated that "the principal frequently organizes workshops and invites speakers to discuss digital learning" (Teacher 3), while another teacher mentioned that "we are encouraged to participate in academic and non-academic training to make learning more creative" (Teacher 4). The innovation most noticeably experienced by teachers was the use of more varied instructional models and digital learning media. One teacher explained that "the use of digital boards is very helpful because learning becomes more practical and students become more active" (Teacher 5). In addition, teachers reported that the use of Chromebooks supports the learning process, although the number of devices remains limited.

These findings support the results of previous studies which found that technology integration and innovative learning media can improve student engagement and learning outcomes (Riduansyah et al., 2025; Winters et al., 2024). The interview findings also revealed improvements in the school's physical, social, psychological, and digital learning environments. Teachers stated that "classrooms are now more comfortable and the school environment is better organized" (Teacher 6), while another teacher emphasized that "relationships among teachers and school members are very good, and we frequently collaborate in school activities" (Teacher 7). Regarding the psychological aspect, teachers reported that "students feel safe and comfortable learning because the classroom atmosphere is more supportive" (Teacher 8). In terms of the digital environment, teachers revealed that "the principal strongly supports the use of technology, although facilities are still limited" (Teacher 9). These findings indicate that the principal's innovative leadership has contributed to the creation of a more conducive learning environment.

The results of this study emphasize that school improvement is strongly influenced by leadership practices that support collaboration, innovation, and teacher empowerment. Nevertheless, teachers also identified several challenges in implementing innovation, including budget limitations, discipline related issues, and the readiness of some teachers to adapt to technological developments. One teacher stated that "the main challenge is limited facilities, and some teachers are still not accustomed to using technology" (Teacher 10). However, the principal was considered proactive in providing solutions through training sessions, evaluation meetings, and proposals for additional facilities. Teachers explained that "the principal continuously encourages us to learn new things and discusses challenges through evaluation meetings" (Teacher 11). Therefore, the interview findings indicate that the principal's innovative leadership has had a positive impact on teacher motivation, learning effectiveness, and the creation of a better learning environment. From the results of this study, it can be concluded that leadership support and continuous professional development are important factors in maintaining educational innovation and improving the quality of learning.

Principal Interview Results

Based on the interview results with the principal of SD Inpres 2 Besusu, Amiyatin Raasin, information was obtained indicating that innovative leadership is implemented through the development of teacher creativity, the management of the learning environment, and the utilization of educational technology. The principal explained that "teachers must be able to create creative and innovative learning experiences, not only by following existing examples but also by developing new methods to make students more active." This statement indicates that the principal understands innovative leadership as an effort to encourage change and creativity in the learning process. Similar findings have been reported in previous studies, which emphasized that innovative school leadership plays an important role in fostering teacher creativity and improving instructional quality (Heryani et al., 2023; Riduansyah et al., 2025).

In managing the learning environment, the principal explained that innovation is carried out through improvements to the school's physical environment, such as organizing gardens, maintaining cleanliness, and creating comfortable classrooms. The principal stated that "we strive to make the school environment clean, orderly, comfortable, and green so that students feel comfortable while learning" (Principal Interview). In addition, the principal emphasized the importance of collaboration with teachers in creating positive changes within the school by stating that "each teacher has a different character, so they need to be embraced and encouraged to work together in order to become more creative and diligent" (Principal Interview Findings). This reflects the implementation of collaborative and participatory leadership in school management.

These findings support previous studies which found that collaborative leadership contributes to the development of a positive school climate and enhances the effectiveness of learning environments (Wati et al., 2022). In terms of social, psychological, and digital aspects, the principal explained that the school promotes open communication, instills tolerance, and maintains students' comfort through a humanistic approach. The principal stated that "teachers may be firm, but they should not be harsh, because every student has different abilities" (Principal Interview). Regarding the use of technology, the principal emphasized that "teachers are encouraged to use technology such as laptops, projectors, gadgets, and learning applications to make learning more effective" (Principal Interview).

These findings are in line with studies that highlight the importance of technology supported learning environments and the role of school leadership in encouraging digital transformation in education (Riduansyah et al., 2025). Although challenges remain, particularly regarding the technological skills of some teachers, the principal explained that solutions are implemented through training programs, teacher working groups (KKG), and workshops, because "teachers must continue learning to keep up with developments" (Principal Interview). This finding indicates that continuous professional development is an important strategy for overcoming barriers to educational innovation and improving teacher competence (Khoirunnisa et al., 2022; Riduansyah et al., 2025).

Furthermore, the principal stated that innovative leadership positively influences learning effectiveness and students' motivation to learn. The principal explained that "innovative teachers make students more interested in learning, more active, and create a more engaging learning atmosphere" (Principal Interview Findings). Evaluation of innovative programs is also conducted through supervision and evaluation meetings to ensure optimal implementation. Therefore, the interview findings indicate that the principal's innovative leadership contributes to the creation of a more effective, comfortable, and supportive learning environment that enhances the quality of education. This result corroborates previous findings that innovative and participatory leadership can improve educational quality, strengthen teacher performance, and create a more conducive learning environment for students (Riduansyah et al., 2025).

4. Conclusion

Based on the research findings, it can be concluded that the principal's innovative leadership at SD Inpres 2 Besusu has been implemented very effectively and contributes significantly to the management of an effective learning environment. This is demonstrated by the average questionnaire percentage of 93.22%, categorized as *very high*, covering aspects of innovative leadership, physical, social, psychological, and digital learning environments. The interview findings also revealed that the principal is able to encourage teacher creativity, support the use of educational technology, foster harmonious social relationships, and create a safe, comfortable, and conducive learning atmosphere. Therefore, the principal's innovative leadership plays an important role in improving the quality of the learning environment and enhancing learning effectiveness at SD Inpres 2 Besusu.

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