

The Role of the Principal in the “Target Squad” Learning Community in Elementary School

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Abstract

This study describes the principal's role in managing the “Target Squad” learning community at SD Negeri Gebugan 01, Bergas District, through four managerial functions: planning, organizing, directing, and controlling. The study employed a descriptive qualitative approach with data collected through interviews, observations, and documentation. The results show that the principal has carried out the four managerial functions integratively. In planning, the principal involves teachers in defining the learning community's goals. In organizing, the principal establishes a clear structure and delegates roles according to teachers' competencies. In directing, the principal acts as a motivator and facilitator who fosters reflective collaboration. In controlling, participatory monitoring and continuous reflection are applied. Overall, the principal's role in the “Target Squad” learning community effectively enhances teacher professionalism and strengthens collaborative culture in elementary schools.

Keywords: Principal's Role, Managerial Function, Learning Community

Introduction

Education is a fundamental factor in improving the quality of human resources and therefore demands continuous innovation in teaching practices. One of the prevalent challenges in elementary education is the persistence of traditional teaching approaches that lack reflective practice and creative development. Herawati and Suryani (2022) observe that collaborative practices among teachers remain limited, while Kurniawati (2022) points out that repetitive teaching strategies and insufficient teacher competence negatively affect student learning outcomes. Learning communities have emerged as a strategic initiative to strengthen teachers' professional capacity through shared learning, reflective dialogue, and collaborative professional activities. The Ministry of Education and Culture (2023) characterizes learning communities as groups of educators who engage in continuous interaction to enhance instructional quality. Moreover, Puspitasari and Maulidah (2023) show that such communities promote pedagogical innovation through collective reflection. Nevertheless, several challenges persist, including limited teacher awareness, low levels of active participation, and community activities that are not yet oriented toward improving instructional practices (Agustiningsih & Mustofa, 2022; Lestari et al., 2022; Sari & Nugroho, 2021; Kemendikbudristek, 2021).

The Target Squad learning community at SD Negeri Gebugan 01 serves as a practical example of professional collaboration implemented through regular weekly meetings and joint reflective sessions. The school principal takes an active role by providing direction, cultivating an inclusive and participatory environment, and ensuring the continuity of these initiatives. This leadership approach is consistent with educational leadership frameworks that emphasize the managerial functions of planning, organizing, directing, and supervising (Hasanah & Widodo, 2022). In addition, studies by DuFour and Eaker (1998) and Zepeda (2020) underline the

importance of school leadership in building collaborative and sustainable learning environments, a conclusion also supported by Megawati and Syamsir (2020) and Nurdin and Wahyuni (2024).

Method

This study adopts a descriptive qualitative research design to investigate the principal's role in managing the "Target Squad" learning community at SD Negeri Gebugan 01, Bergas District. The research focuses on four core managerial functions planning, organizing, directing, and supervising as the analytical framework for understanding leadership practices within the learning community. A qualitative approach was chosen because it allows for an in-depth exploration of participants' actions, experiences, and interactions in their natural context, as emphasized by Creswell and Poth (2020). Previous studies have confirmed that descriptive qualitative research is particularly effective for examining leadership dynamics in learning communities, especially when the objective is to capture social realities as they occur organically (Zuchri, 2021; Hakim & Prasetya, 2023).

The subjects of this study consist of key participants directly involved in the "Target Squad" learning community, including the principal, teachers, and community facilitators at SD Negeri Gebugan 01. These participants were selected purposively based on their roles and active involvement in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of learning community activities. Their perspectives provide rich and relevant data for understanding how the principal's managerial functions are enacted within a collaborative professional setting. Data were collected using multiple techniques to ensure depth and credibility, including observations, interviews, and documentation. Observations were conducted to examine learning community activities and leadership practices as they occurred. Semi-structured interviews were carried out with the principal, teachers, and facilitators to capture their experiences, perceptions, and reflections regarding the management of the learning community. Documentation, such as meeting notes, activity schedules, and reflective reports, was also collected to support and validate the observational and interview data. The research instruments consisted of observation guidelines, interview protocols, and documentation checklists developed in accordance with the research objectives.

Data analysis was conducted systematically through several stages, following the qualitative analysis procedures outlined by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2018), as well as Moleong (2021) and Sugiyono (2022). These stages include data transcription, data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Triangulation of data sources and techniques was applied to enhance the trustworthiness of the findings. Overall, all stages of the research process from pre-field preparation, fieldwork, to post-field analysis were directed toward a comprehensive understanding of how the principal implements the four managerial functions within the "Target Squad" learning community.

Results

General Description of the "Target Squad" Learning Community

This research was conducted at SD Negeri Gebugan 01, located in Bergas Subdistrict, Semarang Regency, Central Java Province. The school is situated in Gebugan Hamlet, Gebugan Village, within a conducive rural environment and is easily accessible from the main roadway. SD Negeri Gebugan 01 employs nine teachers and one principal, serving a total of 176 students from Grades I to VI. The school holds an "A" (Excellent) accreditation status and is among the institutions implementing the Merdeka Curriculum in its instructional practices. The school's vision is "to develop students who are faithful, possess noble character, demonstrate intellectual

competence, and embody the eight Graduate Profile attributes.” To achieve this vision, the school has continuously promoted instructional innovation and fostered a collaborative culture among teachers. One of its notable initiatives is the establishment of a teacher learning community known as the “Target Squad,” which is directly facilitated by the principal. This learning community functions as a professional development forum aimed at enhancing teachers’ competencies through reflective practices, pedagogical discussions, and the sharing of best practices. The Target Squad learning community holds regular meetings every Wednesday at 12:30 p.m., following the completion of teaching and learning activities.

The principal takes on active role as a facilitator, mentor and supervisor to maintain both the sustainability and effectiveness of the learning community. Accordingly, this study focuses on examining how the principal exercises four managerial functions planning, organizing, directing, and supervising in managing the Target Squad learning community at SD Negeri Gebugan 01.

The Principal’s Role in Planning the Learning Community

Planning constitutes the initial and most decisive stage in determining the direction and effectiveness of the learning community. Educational management theory emphasizes that effective planning should be systematic, evidence-based, and participatory, involving all relevant stakeholders. In this regard, the principal of SD Negeri Gebugan 01 plays a proactive role in identifying needs, formulating objectives, designing strategies, arranging schedules, and determining indicators of success for the learning community.

Identifying Problems and Conducting Needs Analysis

The principal identifies teachers’ professional development needs by referring to multiple data sources and the outcomes of reflective learning practices. This process begins with an analysis of the school education report card, national assessment results, and routine classroom observations. Based on interview data, the principal explained that needs mapping is conducted systematically through several stages, including school data analysis, surveys, and reflective discussions with teachers. As stated by the principal:

“First, we analyze school data through the education report card, national assessment, and portfolio. Then we conduct surveys and interviews with teachers and students to understand learning challenges. Teacher reflection is also key to identifying our strengths and weaknesses.” (WKS1)

This finding is consistent with the statement of the learning community facilitator, who noted that needs identification is carried out through structured discussions and direct classroom observations, with the principal actively involved in monitoring instructional practices. The facilitator stated:

“We begin with discussions and direct observation. The principal monitors classroom learning, and from the reflection results we identify the needs to be addressed in the learning community.” (WPK1)

Teachers expressed similar perspectives, emphasizing their active involvement in the initial stages of reflection and discussion. This participatory process allows teachers to articulate the instructional challenges they encounter, ensuring that the themes addressed within the learning community align with actual classroom needs. One teacher explained:

“We are involved in the initial reflection and discussion. From there, we express learning challenges, which become the basis for determining the learning community themes.” (WG1)

Observation Findings

Observational data (O1) indicate that during the initial learning community meeting held on 3 October 2025, the principal led the needs identification process through collaborative

discussions with teachers. The meeting agenda included an analysis of student learning outcomes and the mapping of teacher professional development needs.

Documentation Evidence

Supporting documentation collected in this study includes:

1. Minutes of the meeting dated 12 January 2024, which document the results of needs identification and the rationale for establishing the “Target Squad” learning community.
2. The 2023/2024 Education Report Card and National Assessment (ANBK) results, which served as the primary basis for the needs analysis.
3. The absence of formally documented measurable targets, as indicators of success are still communicated verbally rather than in written form.

Table 1. General Description of the “Target Squad” Learning Community at SD Negeri Gebugan 01

Aspect	Description
School Name	SD Negeri Gebugan 01
Location	Gebugan Hamlet, Gebugan Village, Bergas Subdistrict, Semarang Regency, Central Java
School Environment	Conducive rural setting, easily accessible from the main road
Human Resources	1 principal and 9 teachers
Student Population	176 students (Grades I–VI)
Accreditation Status	A (Excellent)
Curriculum	Merdeka Curriculum
School Vision	Developing faithful, well-mannered, intelligent students who embody the eight Graduate Profiles
Learning Community Name	“Target Squad”
Learning Community Purpose	Enhancing teachers’ professional competence through reflection, discussion, and sharing best practices
Meeting Schedule	Every Wednesday at 12:30 p.m.
Principal’s Role	Facilitator, mentor, and supervisor
Managerial Focus	Planning, organizing, directing, and supervising

Table 1 provides a concise overview of the context in which the “Target Squad” learning community is implemented at SD Negeri Gebugan 01. The table summarizes key institutional characteristics, including the school’s location, environment, human resources, student population, accreditation status, curriculum, and vision. It also outlines the main features of the learning community, such as its name, purpose, meeting schedule, and the principal’s role. Overall, the table highlights that the “Target Squad” learning community operates within a well-accredited elementary school that promotes collaborative professional development. It emphasizes the principal’s central role as a facilitator, mentor, and supervisor, as well as the focus on four managerial functions planning, organizing, directing, and supervising which form the foundation for managing and sustaining the learning community.

Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that the “Target Squad” learning community at SD Negeri Gebugan 01 is implemented within a supportive institutional context characterized by strong leadership, collaborative culture, and systematic planning. The principal’s active

involvement in identifying teachers' needs, formulating objectives, and facilitating reflective discussions demonstrates that planning is not treated as a merely administrative task, but as a participatory and data-informed process. The use of multiple data sources such as education report cards, national assessment results, classroom observations, and teacher reflections strengthens the relevance of the learning community activities to actual instructional challenges. This approach suggests that effective planning within learning communities can enhance teachers' sense of ownership and ensure alignment between professional development initiatives and classroom realities.

These findings are consistent with previous studies emphasizing the central role of school leadership in fostering effective learning communities. Hasanah and Widodo (2022) argue that participatory and evidence-based planning is a key determinant of successful educational programs, a claim supported by the present study. Similarly, research by DuFour and Eaker (1998) and Zepeda (2020) highlights that principals who actively facilitate collaborative reflection contribute significantly to the sustainability of learning communities. The involvement of teachers in needs identification, as observed in this study, also aligns with findings by Puspitasari and Maulidah (2023), who reported that collective reflection promotes pedagogical relevance and innovation. Thus, the "Target Squad" learning community reflects broader patterns identified in the literature regarding effective leadership and collaborative professional development.

The results of this study have important practical and theoretical implications. Practically, they suggest that principals should adopt a participatory leadership approach when managing learning communities, particularly by integrating data analysis, teacher reflection, and collaborative decision making in the planning process. Such practices can strengthen teacher professionalism and foster a sustainable culture of collaboration. Theoretically, this study reinforces educational management frameworks that position planning as a foundational managerial function that influences the effectiveness of subsequent functions, such as organizing, directing, and supervising. The findings also imply that learning communities can serve as strategic platforms for implementing curriculum reforms, such as the Merdeka Curriculum, at the school level.

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. First, it was conducted in a single elementary school with a relatively small number of participants, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other educational contexts. Second, the absence of formally documented measurable targets within the learning community restricts the ability to assess outcomes using standardized indicators. Third, the study primarily relies on qualitative data, which, although rich in detail, may be influenced by participant subjectivity and researcher interpretation.

Future studies are encouraged to examine learning communities across multiple schools or educational levels to enhance the generalizability of findings. Further research could also adopt mixed-methods approaches by integrating quantitative measures of teacher performance or student learning outcomes to complement qualitative insights. Additionally, investigating the long-term impact of formally documented planning indicators on the effectiveness and sustainability of learning communities would provide valuable contributions to the literature on educational leadership and professional development.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study reveals that the principal of SD Negeri Gebungan 01 performs a strategic and collaborative managerial role through the integrated implementation of planning,

organizing, directing, and supervising in managing the “Target Squad” learning community. The principal’s data-driven planning, competency-based role distribution, transformational leadership, and systematic supervision collectively strengthen learning community governance and foster a reflective, collaborative, and innovative school culture. This integrated leadership practice confirms the principal’s role as an instructional leader aligned with the principles of *Merdeka Belajar*, contributing to improved learning quality and the fulfillment of students’ learning needs.

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