

The Role of Principal's Participative Leadership in Building Teachers' Intrinsic Motivation: Impact on Learning Quality

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ABSTRACT

The improvement of learning quality in Indonesia is greatly influenced by teacher performance and the effectiveness of principal leadership. This study aims to analyze the role of participatory leadership by principals in building teachers' intrinsic motivation and its impact on learning quality. We obtained data using a qualitative approach through in-depth interviews with teachers and principals, along with document analysis. The selection of research subjects used purposive sampling because the subjects had to meet several established criteria. To make the qualitative data easier to understand, thematic analysis was employed in this study's data analysis. The results of the study showed that the implementation of participatory leadership through teacher involvement in decision-making and granting autonomy was positively correlated with increased teacher intrinsic motivation (autonomy, competence, connectedness). We observed that teacher intrinsic motivation contributes to improving learning quality through teaching innovation, student interaction, and the development of relevant materials. The principal's participatory leadership was significant in fostering teacher internal motivation, which had a positive impact on the quality of school learning. The implications of the study emphasize the importance of adopting participatory leadership as a strategy for empowering teachers and improving the quality of education.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The success of educational institutions in producing competent and character-based graduates is highly dependent on the performance of educators (Kaso et al., 2019; Sy, 2022). Teachers, as the main guard in the process of knowledge transfer and character formation, play an important role in realizing national education (Albadi et al., 2018; Alonso et al., 2025). However, the dynamics of the teaching profession, which include high workloads, administrative demands, and rapid developments in curriculum and technology, are often a challenge in maintaining their motivation and dedication (Hastuti et al., 2021; Lie et al., 2018). This complexity requires an effective leadership

approach at the school level to ensure that teachers remain motivated and able to provide optimal learning quality.

Historically, the leadership model in educational institutions has often been dominated by a top-down and authoritative approach (Gumus et al., 2018). The principal, as the highest authority, tends to make decisions centrally with minimal teacher involvement in the policy-making and school planning process (David Ng, 2015; Ruengmak & Dejpawuttikul, 2024). While this model may be effective in certain situations, research shows that a less participatory approach can hinder teachers' sense of ownership of the school's vision and mission, reduce their motivation, and ultimately negatively impact the quality of learning (Tamphu et al., 2024). This challenge continues today, with many schools still struggling with how to create a work environment that empowers teachers and encourages them to perform optimally.

In Indonesia, with its wide geographic, social, and cultural diversity, the challenges in education management are even more unique. The policy of decentralization in education provides greater autonomy to school principals, requiring them to have adaptive and collaborative leadership skills (Pacific Policy Research Center, 2010; Nadeem, 2024). However, putting participatory leadership into practice in different schools in Indonesia still has many challenges, such as varying levels of teacher understanding and willingness to get involved, limited resources, and school cultures that might not fully encourage participatory methods (Dugan & Letterman, 2008; Kriyantono, 2014). Therefore, it is very important to have an in-depth understanding of how to effectively implement participatory leadership by school principals in the Indonesian context.

Principal leadership has a major impact on the school's work climate and directly influences teacher motivation (Yalçinkaya et al., 2021; Sanchez et al., 2022). Principals who are able to create a supportive, collaborative environment and provide space for teacher professional development tend to have more motivated teachers (Long et al., 2020). Teacher motivation, especially intrinsic motivation that comes from within the teacher themselves, such as a sense of competence, autonomy, and connectedness, is the main catalyst for effective learning quality. Teachers who are intrinsically motivated will be more enthusiastic in teaching, innovative in developing learning methods, and responsive to student needs, which will ultimately improve overall student learning outcomes (Clanton Harpine, 2024).

While there has been a lot of research on how school principals lead and how that affects teacher motivation (Wang & Zhang, 2021; Scallon et al., 2023), there hasn't been much study on how a principal's participatory leadership specifically helps boost teachers' internal motivation and how that affects learning quality, especially in Indonesia. Previous studies mostly look at leadership in general or how teacher motivation affects student learning outcomes, without thoroughly examining how principal participatory leadership can encourage teachers' internal motivation and how this motivation shows up in classroom teaching (Er, 2021; Anselmus Dami et al., 2022). This study aims to analyze in depth the role of participatory leadership on the part of the principal in building teachers' intrinsic motivation and examine its impact on the quality

of learning in schools. The main research questions to be answered are (1) How is the participatory leadership of the principal implemented and perceived by teachers, and how does the participatory leadership of the principal contribute to teachers' intrinsic motivation (in terms of autonomy, competence, and connectedness)? This study is expected to provide theoretical contributions by deepening the understanding of the mechanism of the influence of participatory leadership on teachers' intrinsic motivation and its implications for the quality of learning.

2. METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study design to deeply analyze teachers' perceptions of participatory principal leadership, as well as its impact on teachers' intrinsic motivation and learning quality. The choice of a qualitative approach is based on the need to understand the phenomenon holistically from the perspective of participants, which cannot be measured quantitatively (Scroll & For, 2014).

Data collection was carried out through in-depth interviews with teachers and principals, participant observation in the school environment, and analysis of related documents such as lesson implementation plans and meeting notes. Sample selection was carried out by purposive sampling, involving teachers and principals who were relevant in participatory leadership practices. We then analyzed the collected data using thematic analysis techniques, beginning with interview transcription, coding, and categorization, to draw integrated conclusions. Data validity was ensured through triangulation of sources and methods and involved member checking to ensure that the researcher's interpretation was in accordance with the participants' experiences.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The following is a thematic model illustrating the role of the principal's participative leadership, as shown in Figure 1.

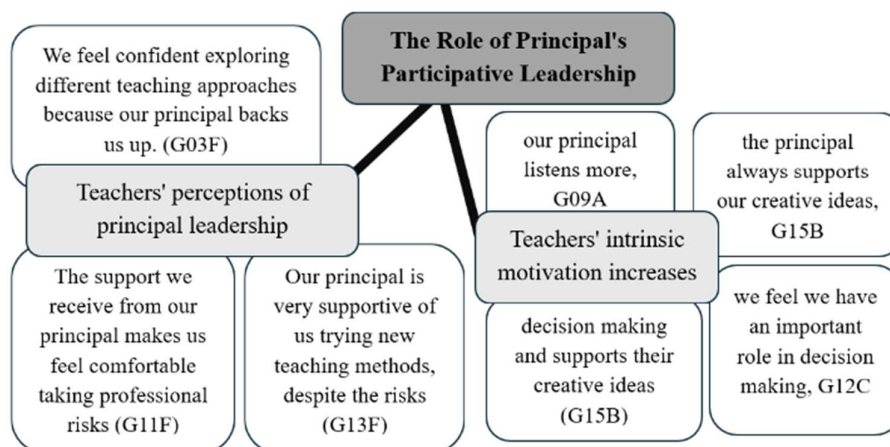


Figure 1. Thematics The Role of Principal's Participative Leadership

Teachers' Perceptions of Principals' Leadership with A Participatory Style

The results of this study show that teachers' positive perceptions of principals' leadership with a participatory style have a strong and significant correlation with increased job satisfaction, intrinsic motivation, and teachers' sense of ownership of the school institution. This finding is in line with various previous studies that have become the foundation of educational leadership literature. Specifically, this study strengthens research that highlights the positive impact of teacher participation in decision-making on professional autonomy and pedagogical innovation. In addition, this finding is also consistent with studies that found that a participatory work environment increases teachers' affective commitment and reduces levels of work burnout (Ledger et al., 2016; Holmström et al., 2023; Ali, 2024; Mudjisusatyo et al., 2024). This consistency shows that a participatory leadership style is not just a preference but an essential prerequisite for creating a school climate that is conducive to teacher professional development and learning quality. The implication of this finding is that principals must proactively adopt and strengthen participatory practices to optimize the potential of human resources in schools.

The comparison of the results of this study with previous studies further clarifies the significance of participatory leadership style in the educational context. This study found that schools with principals who practice participatory leadership tend to have higher teacher retention rates and stronger collaborative climates. This finding is in line with comparative studies that concluded that schools with participatory principals have lower teacher turnover compared to schools that adopt an authoritarian leadership style (Ke et al., 2019; Yalçınkaya et al., 2021; Parlar et al., 2022). Furthermore, our findings regarding improved student learning outcomes in schools with participatory leadership, especially through teacher involvement in curriculum planning, resonate with the results of the study. Research explicitly shows that teacher involvement in curriculum development increases the relevance and effectiveness of teaching materials, which ultimately contributes to improved student academic achievement. This comparison confirms that the benefits of participatory leadership are not only limited to teacher well-being (Ledger et al., 2016; Adu-Marfo et al., 2024; Ghamrawi et al., 2024), but directly and indirectly contribute to the achievement of core educational goals. The contribution of this study lies in adding solid empirical evidence from the local context, which enriches the theoretical framework of participatory leadership (Dickson et al., 2021; Karim et al., 2025).

Despite strong alignment with previous research, the results of this study also highlight the nuances and challenges in implementing participatory leadership styles. Several findings suggest that resistance to change or lack of teacher readiness to actively participate in decision-making can be a barrier (Lomba-Portela et al., 2022). This aspect is in line with the warnings raised by several researchers who underline that the transition to a participatory leadership model requires thorough preparation and ongoing support (King & Holland, 2022). This study shows that although teacher perceptions of participatory leadership are generally positive, as indicated by the statement, "*Our principal is very supportive of us trying new teaching methods, despite the risks*"

(G13F), the sustainability and depth of participation are highly dependent on the principal's strategies for building teacher capacity and fostering a culture of trust. An important implication of this finding is that principals cannot simply claim to be participatory; they must actively democratize the decision-making process and provide the necessary training and support for teachers. This research helps us better understand the factors that affect how well participatory leadership works in schools and gives useful suggestions for making it more flexible and lasting.

Teachers' Intrinsic Motivation Significantly Increased with Principal's Participatory Leadership

The findings of this study consistently indicate a significant increase in teachers' intrinsic motivation with the implementation of participatory leadership by the principal. More than just providing direction and setting regulations, the participatory leadership observed in this study involves the principal's active involvement in activities carried out by teachers. For example, teacher responses to statements such as (*Our principal listens more*, (G09A) indicate that principals with participatory tendencies prioritize listening to teacher aspirations and complaints, which have the potential to be transformed into work programs that are relevant and responsive to teacher needs. In line with this, the statement (*Our motivation increases*, (G08B) can be interpreted to mean that the principal's approach is able to embrace and involve teachers who actively contribute to increasing their motivation. Furthermore, statements such as (*We feel we have an important role in decision-making*, (G12C) strengthen the indication that teachers feel substantial autonomy and involvement, which are key elements of intrinsic motivation. In addition, the response to (*The principal always supports our creative ideas*, (G15B) shows how participatory leadership provides space for self-development and innovation, which also contributes to a sense of competence and motivation from within teachers.

This study is in line with the findings emphasizing the importance of teacher involvement in decision-making to increase motivation (Ke et al., 2019; Burns et al., 2021; Zhang et al., 2021). In addition, these results also support research that found a positive correlation between effective communication and active listening by leaders and increased teacher morale. Furthermore, this finding is consistent with studies that highlight how feeling valued and heard and being given space to be creative can trigger intrinsic motivation in teachers (Ledger et al., 2016; Tamphu et al., 2024).

On the other hand, this finding may provide a different nuance or complement research that focuses more on the structural aspects of leadership that affect teacher performance (Kyei-Akuoko et al., 2025; Pardosi & Utari, 2022). While this study specifically highlights the development of intrinsic motivation, this increase in motivation, theoretically and based on observations, has strong implications for the potential for improving teacher performance in the future. This difference in focus suggests that participatory leadership has a significant psychological dimension in influencing teachers, beyond just organizational structure.

The results of this study provide a significant contribution to enriching the understanding of the dynamics of leadership in educational environments. Practically, this finding underscores the importance for principals to adopt participatory leadership, which focuses not only on providing instructions but also on listening, embracing, and actively involving teachers in various aspects of school management. "*By providing opportunities for teachers to feel that they have an important role in decision-making and supporting their creative ideas*" (G15B), the principal can effectively foster teachers' intrinsic motivation. This increase in motivation is expected to have a positive impact on the overall quality of learning, because motivated teachers will tend to be more dedicated, innovative, and effective in carrying out their duties as educators, which will ultimately improve student learning outcomes.

4. CONCLUSION

This study comprehensively confirms that participatory principal leadership has a significant impact on teachers' intrinsic motivation and their positive perceptions, which in turn contributes to improving the quality of learning in schools. Participatory principals successfully encourage a sense of pride and autonomy in teachers by actively involving them in decision-making, supporting creative ideas, and adopting a more listening approach. These findings are consistent with previous literature but enriched with empirical evidence from the Indonesian context, highlighting the importance of adapting to local conditions. The main implication is that principals should proactively implement participatory strategies, not only as a managerial practice but as a foundation for empowering teachers and achieving higher educational goals.

Although this study has provided valuable insights, future studies can expand the scope by exploring more complex moderating and mediating factors in the relationship between participatory leadership, teacher intrinsic motivation, and learning quality. For example, studies can analyze the role of school organizational culture, teacher experience levels, or the types of training provided to principals. In addition, the use of longitudinal research methods in several schools with different characteristics can provide a richer understanding of the dynamics of change and the sustainability of the impact of participatory leadership. The development of participatory leadership intervention models tailored to the educational context in various regions of Indonesia can also be the focus of research.

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